THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

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A Continuing Saga: We Won't Get Fooled Again

VVAW National Office

VVAW in New York City, 1968.

From the National Office

The attacks on civil society and our rights are intensifying. The current Administration is spewing hatred and destruction faster than we can track. It's overwhelming and easy to be engulfed in every putrid utterance. We must step back and rely on our decades of experience in the struggle to help us see the bigger picture.

We have seen and studied this before. Most of these folks are not geniuses. Some, like the president, are driven by hate, greed, and the quest for power. Others have studied the fascist playbook and are using it as a blueprint for dictatorship.

Control of the military is an essential part of any fascist takeover. We veterans understand the military from the inside. As we fought to end unjust wars and struggled for peace and justice, we found a unique perspective. As scholars of movement history, we know the destruction of the military is a dangerous precedent. We can look to Nazi Germany, Italy, Argentina, and other countries to understand how fascism took power.

Trump continues to create a climate of chaos in the military, undermining its leadership and destroying any possibility of its being used to dethrone our new king. His Putin-inspired destruction of the military command structure opens the door for control of every aspect of civil society in the US and an unlimited reign. In addition, the weakened and repurposed military will be no obstacle for Putin's continued aggression in Ukraine, as well as opening the door for Putin's real goal—the Russian expansion across Europe.

Much of the current playbook appears to be drawn from the pages of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. The takeover involves the use of active duty and federalized troops to carry out executive orders. We also see the neutering of the Supreme Court, and the court not even offering a rationale for its decisions—just ruling in Trump's favor. Trump also ordered special units comprised of the National Guard and ICE, recalling the origins of the SS in Nazi Germany. The military is being reshaped by one man—part putty, part rock-hard SS doppelgänger. They are hoping that a military turned into mush can't be used against them, or against Trump's dominant Putin.

The Military as Plaything of the Oligarchy, 2025

The fascist destruction of the Constitution was not enough for this Administration, now they're unfolding massive voter intimidation tactics in the blue cities and states. Mobilizing troops in the name of safety or security is the "softening

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Building for Future Generations: VVAW Library and Learning Center Updates

VVAW

Front view of the Hanh Minh construction progress, October 2, 2025.

VVAW remains amazed at the support we have received to continue building children's libraries and learning centers in Vietnam. In 2019, when we funded our first project with Chuck Theusch of the Library of Vietnam Project, we would have never imagined that only six years later, our fourth funded project would be underway, and we have just signed off on a fifth project to be completed in 2026. We are also in talks for a sixth project after that. Again, amazing.

Without the many small donors, bequests, and major donors, none of this would have been possible. When we say every donation helps, we really mean it. Not only do your funds help build the libraries, but they also help with ongoing upkeep and upgrades at the already completed projects. Thanks to the generosity of Richard and Debra Peters (long-time Wisconsin-based VVAW members), we just signed the paperwork to build our fifth funded project at Cat Tuong Secondary School, in the Xuan An Commune, Gia Lai Province, Vietnam. By the end of 2026, this library and learning center is expected to be serving the children of Vietnam.

Chuck Theusch and Khoi Tran of the Vietnam Library Project are preparing for another visit to Vietnam at the end of this year. They handle all contracts and contractors, as well as navigating the complex web of local Vietnamese people's committees and central government approvals. Recently, they had to cope with the extensive district renaming that is currently underway in Vietnam. They maintain contact with all the VVAW library projects, as well as the numerous others they have in the region.

Once our projects are completed and the library and learning centers are open for students to use, Chuck and Khoi begin generating additional donations for their upkeep and expansion. Financial and other support comes from the local and provincial governments, other NGOs, local alums from area schools, the Library of Vietnam Project, and other Vietnam veterans. This helps make these projects ongoing and improve the mission to educate and serve future generations of Vietnamese children.

Here are some updates on the Library and Learning Centers, which VVAW funds.

#1 From our first Library at the Pho Vinh Secondary School (grades 6-9), Duc Pho town, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam.

After completing the library and learning center, VVAW also funded an outdoor Readers Garden. Since then, others have funded tables and benches for the garden. We have just provided more funding for more tables and benches.

#2 From our second Library at the Hanh Trung Primary School (grades 1-5), Nghia Hanh District, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam.

The libraries are always in need of more books. To support this Library, VVAW just donated more money to purchase books. Fortunately, many books are available for purchase in Vietnam, since the cost of transporting books from the US is prohibitive.

The Library of Vietnam Project

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More VVAW Library photos on page 8.

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VVAW Library and Learning Center Updates

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is offering scholarships here (and at all the schools). These are general education scholarships. Teachers select 10 kids from each school, and they are awarded $50 each to help with their education.

#3 From our third Library at the An Nghia Secondary School (grades 6-9), An Nghia Village, Binh Dinh Province, Vietnam.

Thanks to the computer lab and large flat-screen TV we funded, as well as the expanded presence of the library staff, our library and learning center is a beacon of hope to the children in the Hoai An District, according to the headmaster. The technology is routine in the US, but in the shadows of the 1966 Xuan Son Battlefield, it is indeed groundbreaking.

#4 From our fourth Library at the Hanh Minh Secondary School, Nghia Hanh District, Quang Ngai Province.

Construction is ongoing at the Hanh Minh VVAW library and learning center. Upon completion, this will be the largest project ever undertaken by the Library of Vietnam Project. The local officials and the chair of the Commune People's Committee are excited about the completion of this library and learning center and hope it will serve as a model and inspiration for future development in the area.

Hanh Minh construction progress, September 24, 2025.

#5 From our fifth Library at the Cat Tuong Secondary School, Xuan An Commune, Gia Lai Province.

The paperwork for this new project has just been signed in what was formerly the Phu Cat District of the Binh Dinh Province. Groundbreaking is planned for mid-December, when Chuck and Khoi will be visiting Vietnam. We are excited to keep the building momentum going. Stay tuned for more updates in early 2026.

The role of education is crucial to our continued funding of children's libraries and learning centers in Vietnam. The direct consequence is that children in poor and often still war-ravaged areas can access books and computer labs in dedicated spaces. Also, we hope that by supporting these projects, we draw attention to the damage our war in Vietnam wreaked upon the people and the land. Wars have consequences—long-lasting consequences.

If you would like to include VVAW in your will and are unsure of the process, please get in touch with us. If you'd like to make a significant donation now, please get in touch with the National Office at vvaw@vvaw.org. VVAW is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Thanks to Jeff Danziger and Billy Curmano for their cartoons. Thanks to Jim Wachtendonk for his artwork. Thanks to Chuck Theusch, Paul Goyette, Ken Nielsen, Joe Miller, Sarah Axel, Tom Wetzler, Chet Hill, Jack Mallory, Maurice Simon, EC Streeter, Bhavia Wagner, Nadya Williams, Paul Goyette, Linda Loew, and others for contributing photos.

Veteran Staff

Jeff Machota
Bill Branson
Joe Miller
Meg Miner

The Veteran is available online, article by article, or as a downloadable pdf at www.vvaw.org/veteran/

Thanks to those who have put VVAW in their wills. These gifts have have helped VVAW keep on keeping on and have contributed to the building of libraries in Vietnam we are sponsoring. If you would like to put VVAW in your will or make a major donation now and don't know how, contact the National Office at vvaw@vvaw.org. VVAW is a tax exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

VVAW Merchandise

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Fighting for Veterans, Peace and Justice since 1967
www.vvaw.org

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A Continuing Saga: We Won't Get Fooled Again

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up" part of the next barrage to undermine state sovereignty. This shit represents a qualitative leap in the fascist destruction of the Constitution, and the opening salvo of a real-live sublimation of state governments into the Nazi Republican party via armed force. Don't be surprised if you have to pass a line of masked paramilitary personnel on the way to the ballot box and in the places where votes are being counted.

They know they don't have the majority of the country, so they're promoting gerrymandering, suppressing Black/Brown voters—aiming for permanent domination through redistricting and purging voter rolls, essentially banishing non-white people from voting. As if that's not enough, Trump wants to ban mail-in votes. That's how the military votes, and has for decades, so he's essentially promoting a plan to disenfranchise the very people whose labor he's abusing.

We witnessed the initial salvo of sublimation in California. Fantasies of "invasions" dancing in Trump's head resulted in the Marines invading LA, along with the Guard, to intimidate anti-ICE protesters. Guardsmen turned into Groundsmen chatting with tourists when not spreading mulch in the nation's Capitol. Will they still have their jobs when they are allowed to go home? Military lawyers being used as immigration judges is a new twist on the mission creep we're seeing. What preparations do these people have for this duty? Using military bases and personnel for immigrant concentration camps and military resources (planes/personnel) for transport round out the current list of abuses.

As we go to press, Portland is being invaded, with Seattle likely next on the list. Progressive politicians are fighting back in both cities, along with those in Chicago who are waging a battle to keep federalized troops from reinforcing the already rampaging ICE kidnap squads.

Feeding Hegseth's ego and personal fantasies by renaming the Department of Defense to the Department of War (and wasting how much money in the process?) was done in the same breath that Trump insulted veterans of all the US military operations since World War II. He and his handlers in the 1% are doubling down on their real views towards GIs and vets—cattle used as cannon fodder and then thrown away.

None of this is truly new to veterans—we are very familiar with the "use and toss aside" treatment from policy makers of all parties. The ongoing conversion of the VA into a goldmine for private healthcare capital through privatization is one fine example. If we let those VA doors close, the survivors of the rich's wars will be a new kind of fodder—expendable bodies to feed the for-profit healthcare empire.

Who Benefits?
Who Do We Have to Defeat?

Ask who is behind all of this current chaos, and we can see that it's the same as our war: people with the money making money off of this chaos, not the average politician or influencer. Rich people, the 1%, use their system to keep the rest of us feeding their greed.

Check out what it took to defeat the Nazis in WWII. Check out what it took to get rid of the last bunch of these maggots. The fight today will soon have to morph into organized and underground resistance, or we'll end up in one of their many Alligator-Alcatraz vacation resorts.

Our focus needs to be on organizing. VVAW members are familiar with this process. Identify the young people and veterans in your area. The people showing up to town halls and mass demonstrations are primed for resistance as we knew it. Lead or organize with them. Ally with whom you can. Support anti-fascist Democrats, not the mainstream, sellouts in the party. We've had enough of the DNC gutting any newcomers who have even a chance of leading a mass movement.

What Else Can We Do?
We've Said This Before, and It's Still True

Arm ourselves with knowledge, and don't be swayed by the algorithms of the rightward-enabling tech companies. Share information. Share our experiences with relatives, friends, and yes, acquaintances who have drunk the Kool-Aid. Organize at all levels to survive and fight against these oppressive forces. Organize information exchanges. Organize phone and text trees to spread warnings and information. Utilize every avenue you have.

Until we can get more non-accommodationists in the opposition party, we must encourage the Democrats' leaders to resist compromise and cease bootlicking the right. The Republicans thwarted the Democrats for years when they were in the minority. Pressure all politicians to be the resistance.

Support those progressive Dems fighting to take power from the DNC old guard, who are busy placating the fascist regime. Call. Write. E-mail, including writing and/or calling elected officials, even Trump! Join protests if you are able. Support organizations resisting and helping those being hit the hardest. Every dollar and volunteer hour counts.

While local or even regional victories can and will be won via struggling with the Democratic party, we must not allow ourselves to be absorbed and co-opted by what has become a tool of the 1% for frustrating and sidetracking progressive individuals and organizations.

Don't look to the system to save us—we must build organizations that fight and force change. We can and must build a new political pole. Our organizing must be geared for the longer, hard struggle it will take to not only rid us of these thugs, but to force changes that truly allow democracy to flourish for us. We must wield our strength and unity with the will to pull the cushy rug out from under these 1% leaches and Nazis, never to see such power and wealth hoarded by a few again.

Many unions are leading the protests against VA cuts. We can support them, spread the word, and, if possible, attend the rallies. Organizing and resistance do pay off. Organize, organize, organize.

Let's also make sure the people we join with understand that the National Guard members are NOT our enemies. We all know why the average Joe enlists in the Guard. If you speak to them make it clear your protest isn't against them, it's against their orders.

We need a new GI Movement and must share the lessons of the one from our war. The anti-war movement ended the war in Vietnam. GI resistance ended the reliability of the military as the rich's tool in Vietnam. The civil rights struggle was won in the streets.

Will this be enough? Maybe. But inaction will certainly lead to defeat. This battle won't be won until power truly rests with the people. We must ensure the lessons of our struggle and legacy survive to guide future generations.

VVAW action at the Fountain Bleu Hotel in Miami Beach during the Republican National Convention, August 23, 1972.

Fraggin'

Bill Shunas

Trump has decided that what was the Department of Defense should henceforth be called the Department of War. Okay? No skin off my back, but what's in a name if your fight is an unjust military operation? His renaming of the Pentagon is really no more than another attempt to keep his face on TV, his voice on the radio, and his little fingers all over the Internet. I'm not a shrink, but it seems that the guy is off. Many of his supporters would agree. Forgive me if I sound like him. He's always saying "many supporters" or "many experts" to make it sound like his position is correct.

The anti-Trumpers may be divided into two general categories. One group is those who look at him as an American fascist ready to change our way of life in favor of some form of fascism. The other group of anti-Trumpsters has one simple explanation. As voiced by one of the talking heads. "He's stupid." Maybe, just maybe, both groups are right.

Maybe it's both. Maybe Trump has an agenda to bring fascism, and he, at the same time, is mentally challenged—or stupid. Either way, there is a shadow over the land. Bringing fascism here probably includes having some intellect on which to base an ideology. That's why you have presidential advisers. Like Kristi Noem. They shoot dogs, don't they? Their own. And she probably thinks more of her dogs than her constituents. Trump has plenty of advisors to go along with this program. Start with Stephen Miller. Or don't start with Stephen Miller. Too sleazy, but a perfect Nazi. In picking his aides and advisors, judges, and cabinet, he leans toward those who drank the Kool-Aid of QAnon.

Among those he has no use for are veterans. Not only does he have no use for vets, but he also takes pains to cut funds intended for the betterment of vets. And the disrespect. For example, at the welcome ceremony for the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Mark Milley chose a severely wounded Army Captain, Luis Avila, to sing "God Bless America." At the ceremony, due to the rain and wet grounds, Avila's wheelchair almost tipped over. Several people rushed to his aid while Trump said, "Why do you bring people like that here? No one wants to see that, the wounded." Trump told Milley never to bring Avila back. This is from the man who was famous for calling pilot John McCain a loser for having his plane shot down. Is there a pattern here?

So, from what I can see, Trump doesn't have the intellect to process a political concept such as fascism. His only skill learned over the years is that of a high-stakes hustler. Reminds me of Minnesota Fats. The main problem is that to continue his current hustle, he brings forth many, many, many fascist people and programs. And the American people are stuck with this gargoyle.

I wonder what active duty personnel think about all this? He's sent the National Guard into several cities, and lots of those soldiers appear to be unhappy. It's supposed to be normal for most of those in the military to support the nation's leader. And it's normal for many to change their minds (see VVAW).

Even if Trump is mentally challenged, this man was able to get elected twice. He has followers. They were willing to face various criminal charges, including treason, on January 6. The table is set. You've got a popular leader. You've got followers who are not afraid of doing something stupid. And Trump makes nice with authoritarians around the world. Not hard to see where Trump gets his ideas. So we resist and wait.

Bill Shunas is a Vietnam veteran, author, and long-time VVAW member.

Stop the VA Cuts and Stand with Ukraine

John Lindquist

Hello to all in VVAW from the "Eastern Front." The Minster Lovell Oxfordshire VVAW Chapter had its first demonstration. There were five of us. One US Marine, me; one Merchant Marine, Les; one Royal Engineer, Brian; one British Army Iraq vet from the Ryles, Nick; and one Royal Marine, Ron.

This all started when Bill Branson sent me information about the unelected billionaire, Musk, cutting 2,400 positions from our VA. Instead of VVAW declaring war on the VA, like in 1973, our President declared war on the VA. VVAW and other veterans must join the fight to support our VA and all the great people who work there. Trump and Musk now want a total of 83,000 cuts to our VA, plus the hiring freeze.

I drew up a leaflet.

1) President Trump and Musk cut 2,400 health care positions from the VA hospital system and have frozen hiring.

2) This is unconstitutional and should be done by Congress. Trump never served in the military. His Dad paid for seven deferments for heel spurs. I was in Marine boot camp with some recruits with heel spurs. Trump is an evader!

3) Stand with Ukraine. President Trump, do not get into bed with Putin. Russia invaded Ukraine. Don't sell out the people of Ukraine.

Each corner of the leaflet had a VVAW shield and a VVAW on the bottom.

I put 37 up here in the village, and some in the market town of Witney, east of us. I talked to lots of people and sent seven Letters to the Editor and three press releases. It felt like the old days.

On the big day, I picked up Les. He lives in the village and delivered fuel to Vietnam in 1969 and 1970. We had sought "permission" from the Veterans Breakfast here at the White Heart Pub, built in 1988. They were 100% behind the idea, and three vets joined Les and me

We started the day leafleting at the local food store. We had a protest sign and wished every woman a happy International Women's Day. We ended the demo at the Village War memorial for one hour and then went to the pub—lots of waves, thumbs up, and horn beeping. Two local papers have printed the Letter to the Editor, and the village is still talking about the demo.

Minster Lovell is a Chartist village, one of three in England. The Chartist movement sought to extend the vote to the common man, not women, at the time. You had to own land to vote, so a rich lord, Feargus O'Conner, bought 400 acres in 1847, had a raffle, and gave away 57 small farmsteads. Parliament refused to okay the deeds, so it went "bust."

The old part of the village, located by the Windrush River, dates back to the 10th century. The barn on Manor Farm is still in use and was listed on the tax roll in 1086.

This is only the beginning,

STOP CUTS AT THE VETERANS HOSPITAL
DON'T PRIVATIZE VETERANS HEALTH CARE
DO NOT GET IN BED WITH PUTIN PRESIDENT TRUMP!
STAND WITH THE PEOPLE OF UKRAINE
st. 1937
"THAT'S BREAKFAST SORTED...
WIN £10,000 CASH
IGNITE YOUR TASTE BUDS
NEW
SPAR

John Lindquist, Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire, England. March 8, 2025.

and the Milwaukee VA had about 500 people at the hospital on March 7th. Veterans, patients, staff, our Congresswoman, and the Milwaukee Labor Council participated. We must keep the pressure on, whether through letters, phone calls, or demonstrations. VVAW has extensive experience, and we are never too old to fight back.

Semper Fidelis.

John Lindquist is a long-time VVAW member from Milwaukee, now living in England.

"The streets of our country are in turmoil.
The Universities are filled with students rebelling and rioting.
Communists are seeking to destroy our country ...
Without law and order our nation can not survive."
Adolf Hitler, 1932
Aug 13 2025 (10628)
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Trump's Executive Order Attacking Veterans and Others

Aimee Potter

Aimee Potter speaks on Memorial Day, May 26, 2025, Chicago.

As a VA social worker and harm reductionist, I work with Veterans who struggle with substance use, addressing opioid overdose in the context of any positive change and applying the same principles to reduce sexually transmitted diseases, including treatment access for Hepatitis C. Since I have started in this position—under the Biden administration in November of 2023, I have worked with over 500 Veterans who have been referred to me, interested in some form of reduction of substance use, or access to safer sex methods, and fentanyl and Xylazine test strips to prevent overdose. Trump's most recent executive order, "Ending Crime and Disorder on America's Streets," attacks Veterans, individuals with disabilities, the homeless, and folks struggling with substance use disorders.

This most recent executive order claims, "Endemic vagrancy, disorderly behavior, sudden confrontations, and violent attacks have made our cities unsafe. The number of individuals living on the streets in the United States on a single night during the last year of the previous administration—274,224—was the highest ever recorded."

Let Mr. Trump tell the truth, particularly in the context of his data. Actually, "On a single night in January 2024," according to the Annual Homelessness Assessment Report completed by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 771,480 people experienced homelessness in the United States, which is the largest number since data collection began and an overall increase of 19 percent since 2007. Compared with 2007, 124,222 more people experienced homelessness in 2024. Between 2023 and 2024, the increase of 118,376 people was largely driven by an increase in the sheltered population, which rose by 25 percent (100,762 more people). The number of people experiencing sheltered homelessness in 2024 was larger than the pre-pandemic sheltered population.

Two-thirds of all people experiencing homelessness in 2024 were in households without children (i.e., individuals). Several factors likely contributed to this historically high number. Our worsening national affordable housing crisis, rising inflation, stagnating wages among middle- and lower-income households, and the persisting effects of systemic racism have stretched homelessness services systems to their limits. Additional public health crises, natural disasters that displaced people from their homes, rising numbers of people immigrating to the US, and the end of homelessness prevention programs put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the end of the expanded child tax credit, have exacerbated this already stressed system.

Nearly all populations reached record levels. Homelessness among people in families with children, individuals, individuals with chronic patterns of homelessness, people staying in unsheltered locations, people staying in sheltered locations, and unaccompanied youth all reached the highest recorded numbers in 2024.

People in families with children had the largest single-year increase in homelessness. Between 2023 and 2024, 39 percent more people in families with children experienced homelessness. Overall, the number of people experiencing homelessness increased by 18 percent. Nearly 150,000 children experienced homelessness on a single night in 2024, reflecting a 33 percent increase (or 32,618 more children) over 2023. Between 2023 and 2024, children (under the age of 18) were the age group that experienced the largest increase in homelessness.

Veterans were the only population to report continued declines in homelessness. Between 2023 and 2024, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness declined by eight percent, or 2,692 fewer veterans. The number of veterans experiencing homelessness has declined by 55 percent since data collection about veteran homelessness began in 2009. The declines in sheltered and unsheltered experiences of homelessness were similar (56% and 54%). These declines are the result of targeted and sustained funding to reduce veteran homelessness. So let Trump tell the narrative, which is not supported by this data, because homelessness among Veterans has declined significantly and persistently, because of the dedication of VA housing programs, dedicated and committed staff—social workers, nurses, program staff, psychologists, and the managers of these programs, committed to improving the lives of Veterans and their families.

"About one in every five people experiencing homelessness on a single night in 2024 was age 55 or older. More than 104,000 people experiencing homelessness were aged 55 to 64, and just over 42,150 people were over age 64. Nearly half of adults aged 55 or older (46%) were experiencing unsheltered homelessness in places not meant for human habitation.

People who identify as Black, African American, or African continue to be overrepresented among the population experiencing homelessness. People who identify as Black made up just 12 percent of the total US population and 21 percent of the US population living in poverty, but were 32 percent of all people experiencing homelessness. However, the share of people experiencing homelessness who identify as Black (of any ethnicity) decreased from 37 percent of all people experiencing homelessness in 2023.

(https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2024-AHAR-Part-1.pdf)

Trump et al claim "The Federal Government and the States have spent tens of billions of dollars on failed programs that address homelessness but not its root causes, leaving other citizens vulnerable to public safety threats." According to this data, and as a provider working on the front lines, these programs are not failures. They are impactful, sustainable, provide cost savings by housing people rather than institutionalizing them, provide improved health outcomes, and are effective. Housing First and harm reduction save lives. This is not an opinion. It is a fact.

...as a provider working on the front lines, these programs are not failures. They are impactful, sustainable, provide cost savings by housing people rather than institutionalizing them . . .

In Illinois alone, we have corrected the wrongs of institutionalizing people with disabilities, under the Colbert and Williams consent decree, recognizing that people who were residing in nursing homes could actually live in the community, and institutionalizing them was a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act. Through this settlement and ongoing Consent Decree, the State agreed to provide support and services to help individuals move to and live in the community, in the most integrated setting that meets their needs. As a social worker in the community, I liberated many individuals with disabilities from nursing homes and into their homes. Many still live in their own homes and thrive without accessing the excessive resources and spending nursing home living costs.

The narrative of shifting homeless individuals into long-term institutional settings for humane treatment through the appropriate use of civil commitment will restore public order is both inhumane, illegal, and unsupported by the research and efficacy of the above consent decrees.

Now is the time for Veterans Affairs Secretary Douglas Collins to show true leadership—not as a spokesperson for a political administration but as a steadfast advocate for veterans.

The executive order undermining "housing first" principles is a dangerous step backward. It ignores years of evidence-based practice and the tireless work of VA staff and community providers who have helped significantly reduce the homelessness of veterans. To deny those accomplishments is not just disingenuous—it's also deeply irresponsible.

"Housing first" is grounded in five well-established principles:

- Immediate access to permanent housing without preconditions.
- Choice and self-determination.
- A recovery-oriented approach.
- Individualized, client-driven support.
- Social and community integration.

This model does not require people to be "housing ready." It recognizes that safe, stable housing is the foundation from which individuals can address mental health, substance use, employment, and other challenges. It works—and it saves lives.

Harm reduction is an essential part of this model. It recognizes that people make change incrementally and that punitive approaches only increase isolation and dishonesty. When we create systems based on dignity, respect, and personal agency, people engage. Veterans heal.

Recently, Secretary Collins and the Trump Administration ended collective bargaining for over 400,000 federal employees, paving the way for further privatization of the VA. With 30% of VA employees being Veterans, the impact of unfair treatment in the workplace is guaranteed to skyrocket. Collins claims "the move will improve Veterans care and allow managers to make the best staffing decisions." The decision is a step toward eliminating tens of thousands of jobs at the agency, creating the justification for terminations and a workaround RIFs and further privatization, as this administration claims Veterans will be unable to be served due to terminations and loss of staffing, paving the way for community care and the decimation of the VA altogether. Our collective bargaining agreement protects workers from unsafe working conditions, provides grievance procedures, outlines personnel policies, and offers other worker protections.

While powerful figures can navigate hardship from the comfort of their own homes, the poor are too often expected to suffer in silence, behind institutional walls and under strict controls. This is not justice. It is not health care. And it is not policy-based on evidence.

Collins and others in leadership must take a stand. If they truly support veterans, they must reject policies that abandon harm reduction and "housing first." The time for passive complicity is over. Real leadership means protecting what works—even when it's politically inconvenient.

Aimee Potter is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and AFGE steward, Local 789.

VA Job Cut Threat:Should Labor and Vets Declare Victory or Keep Up the Fight?

Suzanne Gordon and Steve Early

One of us spent many years as a labor representative in the telecom industry, which has steadily downsized its unionized workforce for the past forty years. This process has been regularly punctuated by corporate headquarters' announcements of big pending "reductions in force" (RIF).

When that alarm bell rings, members of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) have historically been very effective at mobilizing against the latest threatened job cuts.

Through workplace mobilization, outreach to labor, community, and political allies, and direct negotiations with Verizon and AT&T, these unions have often been able to modify a headcount reduction plan with the help of early retirement incentives, thereby averting actual layoffs.

Should this outcome be cause for rank-and-file celebration or serve as another reminder that the next job security threat is not just around the corner but an integral part of a management's long-term restructuring plan?

That was the question facing Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employees and their organizational allies after both got some temporary good news from VA Secretary Doug Collins in July. Four months earlier, a leaked memo from Collins's chief of staff revealed that the Trump Administration wanted to shed 83,000 VA workers by the end of 2025.

This revelation triggered grassroots protests around the country—by veterans' organizations, VA union members, their patients, families, and political allies. In response, Secretary Collins spent many weeks stonewalling his critics on Capitol Hill and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, he presided over a chaotic series of VA contract cancellations demanded by President Trump's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which produced few worthwhile cost savings. And Collins scornfully dismissed the claim that DOGE-driven job cuts might have a negative impact on nine million VA patients.

Headed in The Right Direction?

In a July 7 press release, the former Congressman from Georgia suddenly took a different stance. Collins announced that a 15% reduction in his agency's workforce was no longer necessary. 17,000 VA employees had already left by then, and another 13,000 were expected to do so by September as a result of "normal attrition" or the lure of early retirement or severance payments.

"A departmentwide RIF is off the table," Collins said. "As a result of our efforts, VA is headed in the right direction—both in terms of staff levels and customer service."

A far better indicator of where the VA is headed can be found in Collins' more consistent—but equally misleading—messaging about "making it even easier for veterans to get their health care when and where it's most convenient for them."

In the VA Secretary's view, this means allowing VA patients to make an unfettered choice between their highly qualified VA caregivers and 1.7 million private-sector providers, whose care is often more costly, less effective, and less accessible, particularly in rural areas. "A departmentwide RIF is off the table," Collins said. "As a result of our efforts, VA is headed in the right direction—both in terms of staff levels and customer service."

Collins' budgetary priorities for FY 2026 clearly favor privatization. He wants a 50 percent increase in discretionary spending on outsourced care (which already totals $30 billion a year) and an unprecedented 17 percent reduction in such spending on VA direct care. This ongoing defunding of in-house care will eventually result in more VA staff reductions and facility closings of the sort planned by the Biden Administration but blocked by grassroots protests and bipartisan opposition on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

After Biden's proposed "Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission" was scrapped three years ago, his VA Secretary, Denis McDonough, failed to strengthen VA direct care financing by curbing costly and unnecessary patient referrals to private doctors and hospitals. So, under the second Trump Administration, Collins just picked up where his corporate Democrat predecessor left off.

A Divided Reaction

Nevertheless, some advocates for veterans and their caregivers were quick to give Collins a pat on the back for his July 7 press release. Others issued stronger warnings that the fight to save the VA is far from over because large-scale outsourcing is accelerating under Trump.

While noting that "30,000 job cuts, even through attrition, still risks degrading services," American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) President Everett Kelley called this lesser blow "a major victory." He urged other federal department heads "to follow Secretary Collin's lead" and abandon their own DOGE-driven RIF plans.

Kelley also pledged that, "if the administration continues down the path of privatization, mass layoffs, and unlawful reorganizations, they will hear from us again"—as if there might not be any need for such ongoing membership mobilization?

The million-member Disabled American Veterans (DAV) declared itself to be "cautiously optimistic" about Collins's action. The Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) hailed it as "a notable and encouraging departure from the previously discussed, much larger cuts." In their statements, unlike AFGE's, neither group mentioned the continuing privatization threat which stems from legislation—the VA MISSION Act—which they and other veterans service organizations helped Trump enact in 2018.

Other veterans' groups, like Common Defense and VoteVets, were far more critical. Common Defense national organizer Joanna Sweatt, a Marine veteran, "warned that Trump's attacks on VA healthcare haven't stopped." On behalf of VoteVets, retired Army Major General Paul Eaton predicted, accurately, that the White House still plans to "demonize, downsize, and privatize VA care."

As Robert Anderson, a Veterans For Peace member and VA patient in New Mexico, points out, "the decade-long diversion of funds from the VA for privatization continues at break neck speed… This is the real threat. As a result of cutbacks and shortages, I hear some vets complaining that the VA can't do anything right. And proving that to be true has always been the goal of the Republican jihad against 'government-run' healthcare."

Russell Lemle, former chief psychologist for the San Francisco VA Healthcare System and co-founder of the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute, praised the grassroots organizing and lobbying efforts that resulted in fewer job cuts this year. "But the focus on the number 83,000 was always problematic," he points out. "It set the stage for Collins to scale back his plans and, in the process, appear more reasonable and flexible than he actually is."

A Roller Coaster Ride

A VA local union activist, who wished to remain anonymous to avoid management retaliation, agreed that "announcing big cuts and then implementing smaller ones results in everyone breathing a sigh of relief when we can't afford to let our guard down."

According to Lemle, staff reductions through steady attrition will still have a negative impact on the nation's largest public healthcare system. "When backfilling a vacated position is slowed to a crawl or indefinitely suspended or, worse yet, a position gets removed from the organizational chart, you end up not having enough staff to serve veterans needs which is a recipe for outsourcing more care to the private sector."

The roller coaster ride that VA workers have been on since Trump returned to office has left many worried not just about their short-term job security. Tens of thousands of talented, skilled, and committed healthcare professionals and support staffers now wonder whether they have any future at the agency. "The Administration's message is look for a job elsewhere," one former VA medical center director told us.

The organizational challenge facing VA defenders now is how to maintain morale in their own ranks, while building on recent protest activity in Washington and around the country that attracted many veterans previously unengaged in this struggle.

The longstanding Republican goal of restructuring veterans' healthcare delivery, via ever-expanding privatization, has not been abandoned. And no one is better positioned to resist that continuing Trump administration threat than eighteen million veterans, their families, and the federal workers still able to support them.

Steve Early and Suzanne Gordon are longtime labor and healthcare reform activists who co-authored a book called Our Veterans: Winners, Losers, Friends, and Enemies on the New Terrain of Veterans Affairs (Duke University Press). They can be reached at Lsupport@aol.com.

Decomposed Granite

Whatever happened to that
Tomb of The Unknown
Soldier of Vietnam War
American born
Is it still there?
And long since emptied
Well, gol darn ~ if so
Let's go dig up Lyndon
Unearth that corpse of his
Blast that headstoned
Boulder all to smithereens
And transport him in a B-52
And drop him into that
Emptied sarcophagus
Hell, why not Mac as well?
Brothers ~ arm in arm
Arlington knowns, forever

—John Crandell

"CASREP" Is Navy For "Casualty Report"

OOC
Out of commission
The Navy created CASREPs
So broken equipment
That impeded the mission
The chain would know
The culture of the Navy
Is to cover up problems
Like a mistress in the PI
Part of the deal
A CASREP gets the parts
To fix the equipment
So the ship can do
What the Navy expects
But a democracy that doesn't
Work anymore
Gets covered up
Like a bailout
The media hypnotizes
People to forget
And there's no CASREP
To fix politics
So government can do
What the people expect

—Carl Nyberg

The Wrong People Learned the Wrong Lessons

W. D. Ehrhart

A great many Americans are laboring under the misperception that the United States learned nothing from the Vietnam War. Here, for instance, is a sampling of comments posted in response to a YouTube video on the war:

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=tixOyiR8B-8)

"Replace Vietnam with Afghanistan and Iraq and you have the same story."

"This is the same lesson that Americans STILL don't get to this day. We have continued this through Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond."

"The situation was exactly the same in Afghanistan. We fought and lost the exact same war in two different places decades apart. Those who cannot learn from history are condemned to repeat it."

"It's a terrible pity the US didn't learn the lessons of the Vietnam war. They've been repeating them ever since."

But this perception is simply not true. In fact, the wrong people learned the wrong lessons from America's war in Vietnam. And the lessons these people learned—the foreign policymakers and powerbrokers in Washington, DC, in the State and Defense Departments—have completely removed American foreign policy from the consequences of American domestic politics.

How else can one explain American combat troops in Afghanistan in a war that became the longest war in United States history, without any significant anti-war movement? How many Americans know—or care—that the US still has 2,500 soldiers in Iraq? How many Americans know that we have 2,000 soldiers in Syria? And who cares? Not the American people.

Why should they? The simple truth is that the overwhelming majority of Americans do not care what is done under their flag, in their name, and with their tax dollars, so long as their kids are not the ones coming home in body bags.

This is the first great lesson learned by the wrong people as a result of the Vietnam War. Policymakers actually began to realize this in the later years of the Vietnam War when Richard Nixon reduced American casualties and withdrew US soldiers while drastically increasing military weaponry and munitions to the Saigon regime, resulting in skyrocketing Vietnamese casualties.

By the time this lesson was learned, however, the American people were already disenchanted with our war in Vietnam—not for any moral objections, but because their kids kept coming home dead with no end in sight—so the lesson couldn't be applied to Vietnam.

But by the time of the Reagan Wars in Central America, the lesson was applied with great vigor, and it succeeded. During the decade of the 1980s, American taxpayers were pumping millions of dollars a day—every day, year in and year out—into suppressing peasant attempts to create just and equitable societies in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Honduras, causing untold human misery along with thousands of deaths. But the dead were not Americans.

This is the first lesson the wrong people learned. The second involves the creation of the so-called All Volunteer Army, which I happen to believe is the single worst result of the American War in Vietnam.

While the civilian anti-war movement during the Vietnam War got most of the headlines and news coverage, and while I will not say it had no impact on how the war played out, its influence was far smaller than most people realize. Without an anti-war movement, Lyndon Johnson may have run for office again in 1968. And I'm pretty sure that Nixon would have been happy to go on killing Vietnamese until the cows came home.

But 50,000 demonstrators in the streets of Washington didn't stop the war. Nor did 500,000. Nor did the thousands and thousands who took to the streets time and again in every city in the nation. Indeed, a significant number of their fellow citizens considered them unwashed hippies and cowards and traitors who ought to be imprisoned or shot.

The anti-war movement that eventually brought the war to an end was the resistance to the war, not only from veterans themselves, but also among active-duty members of the armed services. Vietnam Veterans Against the War, first founded in 1967, began to garner national attention in 1970 with very public actions like Operation Rapid American Withdrawal, a march from Morristown, NJ, to Valley Forge, PA; the Winter Soldier Investigation of US war crimes early 1971; and that spring's Operation Dewey Canyon III, that culminated with veterans tossing their medals onto the steps of Congress.

However, even more problematic was the growing resistance within the active-duty ranks. As early as 1969, entire companies of soldiers were refusing to obey their commanders' orders to go into combat (look up Co. A, 3rd Bn, 196th Brig.) This refusal to obey orders only accelerated as the war went on, and grew to include "fragging" (murdering officers and senior noncommissioned officers who were too "gung ho"), deliberate sabotaging of military equipment, and heavy drug use.

In June 1971, *Armed Forces Journal* published an article by Marine Colonel Robert J. Heinl, Jr., titled "The Collapse of the Armed Forces," detailing what I've written about above. Well before American ground troops finally left Vietnam, the military brass were telling Nixon, in effect, "You had better get the military out of Vietnam while you still have a military to withdraw."

In the wake of the near-destruction of the US military—it took most of the 1970s to restore even a semblance of order and discipline—the Pentagon was never going to let that happen again. And the generals believed—not without reason—that much of the problem stemmed from compulsory military conscription.

A significant portion of the US Army consisted of draftees. Many others enlisted only because they knew they would be drafted eventually, and felt they might get better assignments if they enlisted. Moreover, many other young Americans enlisted in the Air Force, the Navy, or the Coast Guard rather than waiting to be drafted into the Army. But as the war went on and on, fewer and fewer of these draftees and "volunteers" supported the war or cared about it. Long before the war ended, the big question became: "Who's going to be the last sucker to die in Vietnam?"

So the Pentagon demanded an end to the draft and the creation of a non-conscripted military. Who volunteers today? A certain percentage are the same testosterone-fueled adventure-seekers who have always signed up. And today, I imagine this even includes several women who are out to prove they can do anything men can do.

Many other "volunteers" are, in effect, economic draftees, young people with few resources and limited job opportunities for whom the military offers a career, some kind of training, or money in the future for college they could never otherwise afford. In short, young people from the segment of our population with the least clout and the least voice in our political system.

So if they are among the unfortunate few who die in Iraq or Afghanistan or Syria, so what? For goodness' sake, four American soldiers were killed in Niger a few years back! Niger? And who cared about that except the families of those four dead soldiers? They were volunteers, anyway.

Moreover, they are part of a hermetically sealed society that is trained to see themselves as warriors. They do not question the mission. Their loyalty is to each other and their service. They are professionals. And they are just what the military leadership and civilian policymakers want. Do what you're told, and don't ask why.

For many years, I taught high school at an elite private boys' school. The cost to send a kid to my school, by the time I retired six years ago, had reached over $45,000 a year. This was not a boarding school. And if you wanted lunch, you had to pay extra.

I taught perhaps 1,600 kids in my time there. And in all those 19 years, not a single student of mine did what I did: that is, forgo college and enlist in the US military as a private. Not one. And why not? Because every last one of them had better options.

I taught the kids of US Representatives and US Senators. The children of high-powered lawyers and chief executive officers, movers and shakers. People With Clout. Major league Bigtime political clout. And here's where Lesson #1 and Lesson #2 intersect.

Why should the parents of my students give a Big Rat's Ass about what the US government is doing in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Syria? Their kids will never die in Niger, or anywhere else the US may send combat troops. Except for the one or two each year who attend a service academy, receive a free education, and become officers with a guaranteed job that will serve as a springboard for better things to come, none of the kids I taught will ever serve a day in uniform.

These, alas, are the two greatest lessons learned by the wrong people as a result of the Vietnam War. The blood price paid for American foreign policy is now borne by only a tiny segment of our population, the segment with the least voice in American politics, and the American people don't care who is dying at the wrong end of their tax dollars so long as it's not their kids. Those in charge of US foreign policy learned those lessons all too well.

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W. D. Ehrhart is a long-time VVAW member, poet, and author.

VVAW Library Project Updates

VVAW Pho Vinh Library, Reader's Garden, May 22, 2025. Table and benches donated by School Alumni.

THƯ VIỆN TRƯỜNG TIỂU HỌC HÀNH TRUNG
LIBRARY OF HANH TRUNG PRIMARY SCHOOL
KHÔNG CÁCH GIẢI TRÍ NÀO RẺ HƠN S
Chào mừng
Ngày Nhà giáo Việt Nam

VVAW Library and Learning Center at Hahn Trung, February 6, 2025.

Teacher lectures students assisted by large screen TV at An Nghia VVAW Library, May 2025.

Construction progress with a concrete pump at Hahn Minh, October 2, 2025.

THE VETERAN

SECTION B

Volume 55, Number 2 Fall 2025

Veterans and Unions Unite to Save the VA

KEN NIELSEN AND MICHAEL APPLEGATE

Demo at Hines VA in Chicagoland, September 15, 2025.

The Veterans Administration is under immediate threat. Trump-appointed Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Doug Collins, is unqualified to carry out the duties of his position. Collins advocating for "reform" is in reality a policy of systematic dismantling. Secretary Collins hypocritically is a chaplain in the Air Force Reserve. We may all question how a "man of God" could turn his back on veterans through the staffing cuts and resource reallocations he is parroting and pushing as part of the Trump Regime.

During Donald Trump's first term, the federal government began shifting VA resources away from in-house care and into private community providers—a steady drain that, reports show, moved more than $40 million from the VA's budget into private practices over the past eight years. That redirection, sold as "choice" for veterans, now looks dangerously like a strategy to hollow out and ultimately privatize the VA.

The administration initially proposed cutting 80,000 VA positions—a plan that was only reduced to 30,000 after intense backlash from veterans and unions. Even 30,000 cuts will cripple a system already stretched thin, especially as post-9/11 veterans age and require more complex care. At the same time, federal workers' collective bargaining rights have been stripped, further undermining morale and the VA's ability to deliver quality care.

Since this spring, veterans' groups and VA unions have mobilized urgently to stop that dismantling. About Face: Veterans Against the War, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Veterans For Peace, and unions including National Nurses United (NNU), the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) have joined forces to warn veterans, VA staff, and the public that the administration's policies will mistreat VA workers and strip veterans of the care they were promised and putting their lives at risk.

That organizing has led to numerous rallies and press conferences at VA facilities, including Jesse Brown and Edward J. Hines hospitals. On September 12th, a National Call to Action brought events to VAs nationwide to expose plans to funnel funds to community care and to oppose the rollback of federal workers' collective bargaining rights. Additional actions are scheduled through the midterm elections, focused on pressuring members of Congress to sign a pledge: stop diverting VA funds to private care and restore bargaining rights for federal employees.

The absence of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars from these events is striking. Regardless of political leanings, critics say, those major veterans' organizations should be standing with fellow veterans to defend the VA now—before its capacity is irreparably damaged.

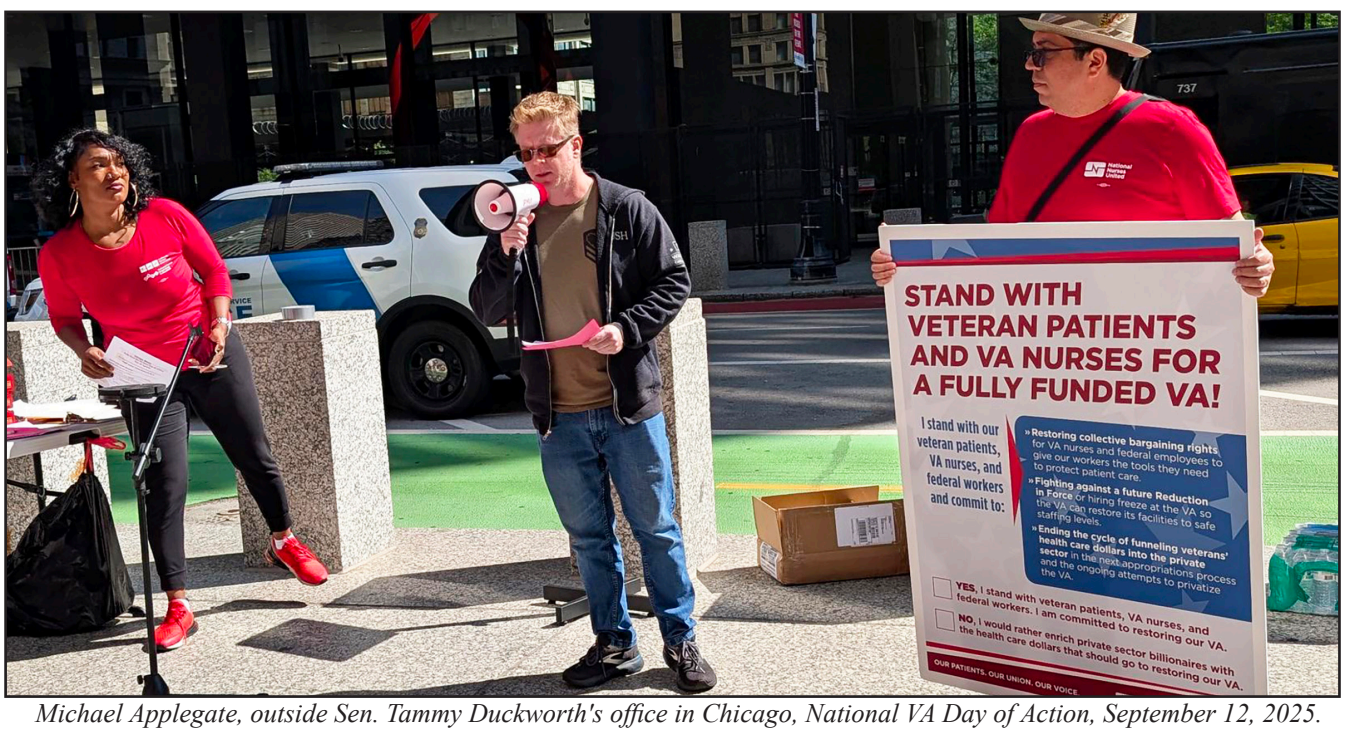
The consequences of shifting care to the private sector are immediate and severe.

First, private providers overwhelmingly lack the decades of specialized experience the VA has built treating veteran-specific conditions—toxic exposures, PTSD, traumatic brain injury, military sexual trauma, and other service-related illnesses.

Second, the US private healthcare system is already overloaded and profit-driven; moving as many as nine million veterans into that system will degrade care for veterans and civilians alike while lining the pockets of insurance companies.

This is a critical moment! Veterans, union members, and allies are mobilizing to defend the VA—and they need broad public and congressional support to stop the erosion of life-saving services, staffing, and workers' rights before the damage becomes irreversible. The choice is urgent: protect and strengthen the VA now, or watch a vital public institution be quietly dismantled. The VA is not perfect, but it is a functioning public healthcare system that works far better for veterans than a wholesale transfer to the private sector would.

KEN NIELSEN IS A GULF WAR ERA VETERAN CURRENTLY LIVING IN CHICAGO. MICHAEL APPLEGATE IS A GWOT NAVY VETERAN AND MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR FROM BERWYN, IL.


STAND WITH VETERAN PATIENTS AND VA NURSES FOR A FULLY FUNDED VA!
I stand with our veteran patients, VA nurses, and federal workers and commit to:
»Restoring collective bargaining rights for VA nurses and federal employees to give our workers the tools they need to protect patient care.
»Fighting against a future Reduction in Force or hiring freeze at the VA so the VA can restore its facilities to safe staffing levels.
»Ending the cycle of funneling veterans' health care dollars into the private sector in the next appropriations process and the ongoing attempts to privatize the VA.
YES, I stand with veteran patients, VA nurses, and federal workers. I am committed to restoring our VA.
NO, I would rather enrich private sector billionaires with the health care dollars that should go to restoring our VA.
OUR PATIENTS. OUR UNION. OUR VOICE

Michael Applegate, outside Sen. Tammy Duckworth's office in Chicago, National VA Day of Action, September 12, 2025.

Alex Foss, Navy veteran, and member of About Face:Veterans Against the War at demo at the Hines VA in Chicagoland, September 15, 2025.

A Labor/Vet Protest:DC Rally and Local Events Defend VA Care on D-Day

Steve Early and Suzanne Gordon

The D-Day anniversary on June 6 is a pretty irresistible date for scheduling a protest related to veterans' benefits. Eighty-one years ago, American soldiers and their allies stormed ashore in Normandy, establishing a critical beachhead in the military campaign to defeat Adolph Hitler and Nazism.

In World War II's aftermath, hundreds of thousands of injured veterans were treated back home in a nationwide network of hospitals run by the federal government. Since then, the VA healthcare system has greatly expanded, and now, through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), it provides high-quality care to nine million veterans. The majority of those veterans want to see the VHA improved and even expanded.

However, during the first Trump Administration, the White House and a bipartisan coalition in Congress decided that veterans' healthcare delivery needed to shift to the private sector. After the passage of the VA MISSION Act of 2018, Trump's second VA Secretary, Robert Wilkie—a right-wing southern Republican—claimed that partial VHA privatization would produce "more patient satisfaction and predictability, more efficiency for our clinicians, and better value for taxpayers."

Using D-Day as a protest peg six years ago, a few veterans and their caregivers challenged this view. Members of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), National Nurses United (NNU), and Veterans For Peace (VFP) staged a "National Day to Save The VA" from privatization. This resulted in modest rallies, press conferences, or informational picketing in only a dozen locations, as the grassroots effort drew little or no support from major veterans' organizations, the national AFL-CIO, or prominent politicians.

A Renewed Assault

President Trump's second-term assault on all services provided by federal workers—along with their jobs and bargaining rights—has finally woken up more unions and veterans' advocates to threats that have faced the VA for more than a decade.

This June 6, five thousand protesters gathered on the Mall in Washington, DC, under the banner of "Unite for Veterans/Unite for America". The event was sponsored by the Union Veterans Council of the national AFL-CIO and the Chamberlain Network. This non-profit group hopes the rally will "encourage the administration to make the right decisions for veterans."

Former servicemembers, including some who belong to AFGE, NNU, NFFE, and other unions, heard speeches from past or present veterans in Congress, such as Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and former Republican House member Adam Kinzinger (R-IL), who became a major Trump critic during his first term.

Thousands of people also participated in actions at 225 other locations around the country, including in vet-heavy red states like Alaska, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Idaho, Kansas, and Kentucky. Some "watch parties," organized for real-time viewing of the DC event, were held in local union halls to highlight the overlap between labor and veterans. The grassroots political organization Indivisible was also an invaluable local partner.

The livestream from DC was greatly enlivened by the Dropkick Murphys, a group of Celtic punk rockers from Boston who Union Vets Council leader Will Attig regularly listened to as an 18-year-old Marine in Iraq.

This pro-labor band got wild applause after performing a new release well suited to the occasion. Its chorus, as belted out by lead singer Ken Casey, asked: "Who'll stand with us?/Don't tell us everything is fine/ Who'll stand with us?/Because this treatment is a crime."

Everything is Fine?

In the run-up to this D-Day, Trump's current VA Secretary Doug Collins—like Robert Wilkie before him—has been telling nine million VHA patients that everything is fine, not a crime, despite his planned elimination of more than 80,000 VA jobs later this year.

According to Collins, a former Republican House member from Georgia, President Trump "is making it even easier for veterans to get their health care when and where it's most convenient for them" by letting them choose between in-house doctors and faster referrals to a nationwide network of 1.7 million private-sector providers. Collins' proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2026 clearly favors the latter; it calls for a 50 percent increase in VHA spending on outside care (which already totals $30 billion a year) and an unprecedented 17 percent reduction in direct-care funding.

Since this budgetary math would necessitate cuts to VHA staff, services, and facilities, one purpose of the D-Day rally in DC was to sound the alarm about Trump's renewed push for privatization. A speaker who did that very movingly was 43-year-old Matt Stevenson, a primary care physician at the VA Medical Center in Palo Alto.

Making it clear he was speaking in a personal capacity, Stevenson lauded his employer as "a mission-driven, patient-centered, cost-effective, integrated American healthcare system… which delivers higher-quality care at lower cost than any other system in the country."

According to Stevenson, under a DOGE-led assault since January, his coworkers around the country have "been disparaged and demoralized… bullied and intimidated" amid "worrisome signs of an attempt to dismantle and privatize the VA." He argued that "those who would take this public treasure—built over generations, by many hands, working long nights in dark hospitals—and sell it off in the name of choice or modernization or efficiency or political gain" can be stopped if VA defenders "come together around a shared vision."

Caregivers Quitting

One of the things that inspired some veterans to attend events was learning that their doctors, nurses, or therapists were quitting, due to deteriorating workplace conditions under Collins.

David Magnus, a Navy veteran from Pittsburgh, told *The Guardian* that he travelled to DC because his trusted provider revealed her decision to leave the VHA during a recent mental health appointment. Outside a Veterans Memorial Building in San Rafael in northern California, Katie Weber-Linhar, a disabled Army veteran, lamented the recent resignation of a popular therapist who treated many vets at an outpatient clinic in Ukiah, in rural Mendocino County.

Weber-Linhar now helps a retired VHA physician hold a weekly protest, attended by patients, family members, and local union members, at a VA outpatient clinic in Santa Rosa, in Sonoma County. She and other VA defenders definitely did not get the memo from DC rally planners, which stressed that "Unite for Veterans" was not intended to be "an anti-Trump event or a partisan protest."

Handmade placards in Santa Rosa included one dissing DOGE as a bunch of "Douchebag Oligarchs Grabbing Everything" and others identifying the sign-holder as a "Veteran Against Trump" and critic of "Trump's America" because of its "Cages for Kids, Cuts for Vets." Ernie Bergman, a cancer survivor and 77-year-old leader of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) in Marin County, criticized "this current government" for trying to take money away from medical research and innovative treatment that saved my life."

VSOs Were MIA

Iraq combat veteran Kristofer Goldsmith, a former staffer for the Vietnam Veterans of America turned podcaster and founder of Task Force Butler, said he was thrilled that "people at the protest in Washington were not the usual suspects. I had people come up to me who had flown in from every part of the country who had never been at a protest before but who wanted to be part of something historic."

Goldsmith noted, however, that some groups were notable for their official absence—representatives of the Big Six Veterans Service Organizations. Just a few months ago, Goldsmith was much encouraged when the national commander of one of these VSOs—the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)—urged his 1.4 million members to "march forth" and "stop the bleeding" at the VA. As a life member of the VFW but a past critic of overly cautious and conservative VSO behavior, Goldsmith viewed this development as "nothing short of extraordinary."

On D-Day, however, the VFW, American Legion, and other major vet groups were MIA. According to Goldsmith, there were VSO members at the DC rally "in a personal capacity," but there was no official staff or representation of the "Big Six." In Goldsmith's view, if the big VSOs "were making enough noise and standing up to the cuts in a way that reflects the urgency of the moment, they would have been on the stage with us."

Key rally organizer Will Attig, who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan before joining a Plumbers and Pipefitters local in Illinois, said that organizers were working with the VSOs "behind the scenes." Hopefully, these efforts will convince major VSOs to end what one concerned representative described to *The Prospect* as their deafening silence on Trump/DOGE/Collins assault on veterans, their dedicated caregivers, and their hard-earned benefits.

The Next Step?

The question, of course, is what next? Will Attig, along with other organizers and attendees, emphasized that this event will be just one of many. It was a "very exciting event that shows what can happen when veterans come together around their issues."

James Jones, a Gulf War veteran from Boone, North Carolina, who is also a federal employee with the National Park Service, a member of AFGE, and of the newly formed Federal Unionists Network (FUN), could not agree more. In a post-D-Day interview with *The Prospect*, Jones said he traveled from North Carolina to the event because he wants legislators to understand the importance the VA has had for veterans like himself.

"I lost friends during the Gulf War, and I've dealt with health issues because of exposure to… you name it," Jones said. "Airborne toxins, oil well fire smoke, burn pits, depleted uranium residue. I've been a VA patient since 1993 and the VA has been beneficial to me because they understand PTSD, military trauma and everything else."

Jones said he hopes that veterans will keep up the pressure. "We have to call our elected representatives, keep going to rallies, and join these groups that are fighting for veterans. Secretary Collins is trying to convince people that the VA is a bloated agency. It's not, they're thousands of positions short. The government needs to keep the promise it made to veterans, we served our country and now they're breaking their promise to take care of us. We can't accept that."

AFGE members who work at a veterans crisis center, activists from the state AFL-CIO and Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council, veterans, and Federal Unionist Network (FUN) gathered on D-Day in the IBEW Local 613 hall in Atlanta.

Steve Early and Suzanne Gordon are longtime labor and healthcare reform activists who co-authored a book called Our Veterans: Winners, Losers, Friends, and Enemies on the New Terrain of Veterans Affairs (Duke University Press). They can be reached at Lsupport@aol.com.

VVAW and Sartorial Dissent in the GI Movement

LILY MORENO-SHERIDAN

The following is an edited excerpt from my undergraduate dissertation entitled "Fatigued: Sartorial Dissent in the GI Movement, 1965-1972." The dissertation presents how GI sartorial dissent was an important aspect of the anti-war movement and how, in the future, scholarship should reflect the anti-war veterans' and GIs' influence on subversive and countercultural fashion. If you would like to read the full dissertation or have a story about the role uniform played in your protest, please email me at l.moreno-sheridan@my.ccsu.edu.

In the early days of the GI Movement, respect was solidified by maintaining a visual and rhetorical opposition to the rest of the increasingly countercultural civilian anti-war movement. It was not uncommon for anti-war veterans to wear suits to demonstrations in this era; their neat appearance and short hair spoke for their "trustworthiness" even before they identified themselves as veterans. The early years of VVAW saw much of this negotiation with personal style evolve.

By wearing their military uniforms to protest the war, the veterans turned the uniform's meaning on its head. The military uniform is supposed to be a static entity, used only to propagate war; however, its meaning becomes diluted the more it is used in opposition to its originally stated goals. Veterans, an almost holy class in American culture then and now, held a social legitimacy that others in the anti-war movement did not possess. In the beginning, at least, right-wing pro-war activists felt less comfortable denigrating marches led by veterans, a social class they had been trained to show affinity for. Veterans and civilian anti-war activists alike used this to their advantage, hoping that the anti-war sentiments being expressed by those valued by the American public would resonate more deeply and open minds. In a society that brushes off youth but reveres veterans, the alignment of civilian and military anti-war activists was crucial to the success of the movement. Barry Romo, another of VVAW's leaders in the '60s and '70s, parrots this point in *Winter Soldiers*: "How are they not going to listen to vets when they say the war's wrong? We're veterans. The American public respects us."

The evolution of VVAW members from the clean-cut, "respectable" looking veterans of the 1960s to the fatigue-dressed, long-haired protesters of the early 1970s exemplifies the continued and evolving rejection of American moral culture. This visual transition lost them favor in the eyes of the more hard-line republicans. In some cities, anti-war veterans became as unwelcome as the countercultural civilians they aligned themselves with.

Criticism of long hair became increasingly relevant in discussions of anti-war veterans' appearances, though it generally lacked the gendered quality that was lobbied at their civilian peers. Some, like military historian Gregory Daddis, have theorized that veterans avoided the emasculating term largely because of their proven masculinity on the battlefield, and a public unwilling to challenge that. In his book *Pulp Vietnam*, Daddis writes that VVAW "seemed to turn the military version of masculinity on its head." They were thus largely left out of the critiques of the anti-war counterculture, especially after the war, as they did not fit the "hippie college student" characteristics pro-war activists attempted to demonize.

With the incorporation of a more radical physical appearance, veterans leaned into the military aspect of their fatigue uniforms and brought them once more into battle. For VVAW, their primary mode of resistance in the early 1970s was guerrilla theatre: staged acts designed to bring the reality of the war in Vietnam directly to the American people. Dressed in the fatigues they wore in Vietnam, members of VVAW acted out scenes of violence on the streets of America. One such protest took the form of a multi-day march in September 1970 called Operation RAW (Rapid American Withdrawal). Marching the route George Washington's army took during the American Revolution, VVAW members, the majority of whom were battle-dressed, mimicked the search-and-destroy operations they had carried out in Vietnam. In this way, they brought the war to the streets not only visually through their fatigues, but also ideologically through their interaction with American history. This appropriation and interaction with American cultural mythology were key features in VVAW's protests. An-

other "search and destroy" operation was conducted by VVAW in Boston in early April 1971. Photographs of this event show VVAW members in M-65 Field Jackets and boonie hats leading civilians who played the role of "prisoners of war."

In 1971, especially, demonstrations by anti-war activists across the spectrum proliferated, continuing the momentum from the previous year. In the lead-up to the April 24 March on Washington, VVAW planned a mobilization for the days preceding it, which they called Operation Dewey Canyon III.

Designed as a days-long "incursion into the country of congress", thousands of veterans gathered beginning the night of the 18th to "demonstrate, lobby, and engage in acts of civil disobedience." Their simulated battle dress was a key aspect of this demonstration, designed specifically to imply that the veterans were at war with the government. On the final day of Operation Dewey Canyon III, hundreds of veterans marched to the Capitol building to discard their service medals. In anticipation of the demonstration, the steps of the Capitol were fenced off, preventing the veterans from climbing them. On the morning of April 23, 1971, hundreds, if not thousands, of veterans and active-duty servicemen rejected their medals and citations, their papers and Purple Hearts, symbolically and literally by hurling them over the barrier onto the steps. The visual rhetoric of fatigued protestors, arms frozen in the action of throwing their trophies of war away, is as poignant today as it was then.

More so than any other protests, descriptions of VVAW's Operation RAW and Operation Dewey Canyon III contain the most conscious acknowledgment of the role fashion played in the GI Movement. Their understanding of the visual power of protest, as former members of the armed forces, was not lost on them, and they weaponized the image of the American GI and its significance in American Culture. Anti-war veterans, Hunt writes, "transformed war symbols into peace symbols." It is this appropriation of the military aesthetic that made their acts so visually powerful. From the VVAW insignia's reimagining of the MACV heraldry to the civilian adoption of fatigues as countercultural garments, they interacted with the symbols of militarism, reclaiming and usurping them instead of outright abolishing them.

Anti-war veterans utilized and maintained much of the social ideology of their uniforms, while subverting their image through the actions they carried out wearing them. The adoption of a more countercultural look, along with a more radical political stance, can be tied directly to their decline in approval and subsequent discrediting by the Republican-led administration. The VVAW remained in fatigues, battle-dressed, because they felt their war was not yet over, and the enemy had changed.

LILY MORENO-SHERIDAN IS A PUBLIC HISTORY MASTER'S STUDENT AT CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY.

Operation Dewey Canyon III, Washington, DC, April, 1971.

Right to Refuse: Rebuilding the GI Resistance Movement

Aaron Hughes

In the midst of the current violent offensive by Elites and the far right, it is important to remember the powerful legacy of our movement and do everything we can to build a GI Resistance movement to meet this moment.

The history of GI resistance makes it profoundly clear that Elites depend on us, our complicity, support, and involvement. They depend on military members complying with their orders and our community members enlisting to fill their ranks. It is in their need for our consent that we have opportunities to mount a profoundly strategic and powerful counter-offensive.

This is why About Face: Veterans Against the War (AFVAW) launched the Right to Refuse campaign this summer. Reasserting that every military member has the right to refuse illegal, unjust, and immoral orders. We want every military member to know that they have rights and options. They have the right, and at times the duty, to refuse illegal orders. They have the right to appeal to their congressional representatives. They have a right to apply for conscientious objector status.

And for all those military members questioning their orders, we want them to know that they are not alone. From the GI Rights Hotline to the Military Law Task Force to About Face, they have a community of people ready to support them. We are building a movement with roots and a powerful history to support it. The spectrum of resisting military members and veterans need to know they are not alone. They are part of a tradition and a history in this country of people rising up and refusing the irrational violence of the State, its foreign adventures, and its domestic terrorism.

When About Face launched the campaign, we created a secure and confidential way for active military members to communicate with us through this encrypted form: *BIT.LY/MILRIGHTS* They can contact us to get support from veterans who understand. They can know they are not alone, that they have options, that they have rights.

Since the deployment of National Guard members to LA and DC, we have had outreach teams speaking to the troops on the ground. Listening to their many gripes and letting them know they have rights and options.

In September, when Trump was threatening to deploy National Guard to Chicago, the local About Face chapter organized with the Military Law Task Force and the National Lawyers Guild to host a rally letting deploying troops know they have a right to refuse illegal orders and calling Governor Pritzker to not only assert that Trump's deployment is illegal but to tell military members that the State of Illinois will support troops that do not comply with these illegal orders.

Governors coming out and suing the Trump Administration, saying that these deployments are illegal, and even winning these lawsuits, is only one side of what is needed. In this back-and-forth between political Elites, the troops on the ground are lost. We've been calling on the governors to refocus their attention on the actual military members. If they believe a deployment is illegal, they need to tell these military members that they will support them in not complying with those orders. And that they, the Governors, will use the vast powers of the State, all of its legal structures, to support these individuals.

Most recently, in a collaboration with Win Without War, we began putting up billboards outside military bases asking military members, "Is this what you signed up for?"

To rebuild the GI Resistance Movement, we want help from every sector to support resistance across the spectrum of ways people can resist, from appealing to Congress to outspoken resistance. And this is not just in the military but across the vast sprawling security state. We want everyone asking, How do we create space for people to resist? How do we support individuals who are resisting? How do we let people know they are not alone and there is a legacy for them to connect to and claim?

This is why we have been trying to raise awareness about the significant history of GI resistance. About Face Board Chair Arti Walker-Peddakotla and I gave a talk at the Socialism 2025 conference, putting GI resistance in relation to abolition and worker rights in the context of the history of state violence. We want activists, organizers, and scholars to see the overlaps between these projects and help rebuild this movement. The military is entrenched in all parts of our lives from our schools to entertainment and veterans are a part of every community and every struggle. It is time for progressive and radical abolitionists to support GI resistance. As war resister Ehren Watada noted, "If we want soldiers to choose the right but difficult path, they must know … beyond any shadow of a doubt that by refusing immoral and illegal orders they will be supported by the people not with mere words but by action."

Watada is reminding us that we need a spectrum of resistance. That's everything from the liberal establishment supporting and creating space for military members to resist these authoritarian orders from Trump to nonviolent action. We need every grassroots organization to do outreach and build relationships to support resistance.

We can look to the movement during the Vietnam Era for inspiration and guidance. Hundreds of military projects were fundamental to building up the GI Resistance Movement. There were over 300 anti-war newspapers on active duty bases around the world. We can look at all of the work during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the many GI Rights Coffee Houses started outside military bases around the country. That work and legacy are fundamentally important at this moment, and we are trying to build alliances to bring attention to this essential strategic and tactical leverage point.

The military, the security state, the advance of the Elites, and the far right in this moment still depend on people. That is their Achilles Heel and a place where we have a lot of power and the potential to organize. It is time to rebuild the GI Resistance Movement.

Aaron Hughes is an artist, curator, and anti-war veteran. He is a member of the Chicago Chapter of About Face: Veterans Against the War and cofounder of the emerging Veteran Art Movement.

Daniel Lakemacher of About Face speaking at Memorial Day, Chicago, May 26, 2025.

Killing Babies: Vietnam 1968

Patrolling in Central Highlands.
U.S. troops zippoing abandoned
grass houses. Flames burning
two centuries of culture.
I notice gunship fire in
the front, to clear our way
into the village. First hut
I come to, the bullets hit
home! Silent infant,
on his mother's hammock,
its brains on the hut floor!
I think of my nephew Wayne
at home, the same age.
No more war!

—Sonny Williams

**zippoing: using zippo lighters*
**gunship: helicopter*

I wrote this poem because I dream of that child all these years, since that horrible day.

Finally in Each War

finally in each war there are no heroes only wasted victims
conscientiously objecting to another stupid useless death
(arresting warm blood torn from leaking limbs
lung rasped pink bubbles froth their breath)
how many more times is hell to be let loose
cursing youngsters we say we love best
children sacrificed who may finally see
our lies as a clear patriotic ruse

dulce et decorum est
pro patria
mori

—Larry Kerschner

A Marine Talks to My Heart

Cesar Hernandez

This afternoon, I listened to a Marine (22-year veteran) make a statement (titled by the media, "A marine veteran fights back tears") and pose a question to Beto O'Rourke that spoke to my heart as a Marine combat veteran of the Vietnam War.

The 22-year veteran essentially stated that, after his long stint in the Corps, he was not prepared for the changes in America that are occurring under the current administration. Specifically, he named President Trump's advisor, Stephen Miller, and the Gestapo tactics that ICE is employing against immigrants and other classes of refugees legally allowed to enter and work in this country. How they are being rounded up, separated from families and jobs, and being incarcerated for deportation.

This brought to mind a letter I was in the process of writing after a visit with another Vietnam Veteran (US Army/Swift Boats), a friend, who voted for Trump. Our conversation began with his calling and ended when I stated that Trump was a coward who had evaded Vietnam with a deferment for bone spurs. As a Marine who had lost 16 friends in Nam, there was no way I could consider him a president and commander in chief of the armed forces. After that short discussion, I set about writing a letter for my friend and other Nam veterans that I also know voted for this misogynist idiot.

I titled my letter, "O' Brother Where Art Thou" after the George Clooney film (which I really liked) with that title. Here's what it has to say about me to a fellow combat veteran.

O Brother, Where Art Thou?

Do we really want to explode on one another over the divisions that are being forced upon us by a class of billionaires intent on taking over our governmental and economic systems for their sole benefit? If so, then this deserves to be said before we tear everything apart over our differences.

Our families, children, and grandchildren deserve clean air and water, as well as a healthy planet to live on; they deserve respect for their individual bodies and life choices that affect only them. They deserve equal opportunities in education and jobs, as well as justice within, without, and before the law. They deserve healthy food, safe products, and tools to help them accomplish their daily lives. They deserve homes, health care, and medicines that don't burden their existence but help facilitate their survival. They need to understand that the society we have built enables them with many rights, privileges, and benefits, and expects us all to develop and contribute to the common good. They need to understand that all of these things come through the contributions, sacrifices, and lives given by our predecessors in establishing our union under a constitution of laws and conduct. I appreciate what I was born into, and I want these things for your family as I want them for my own, and I'm willing to give the last full measure of my devotion to achieve them; are you? Because the divisions being foisted upon us may soon bring our society into the throes of Civil War?

I wonder if it isn't time to be responsible for a future generation of veterans by encouraging them to uphold the solemn oath they took and preparing them to resist unlawful orders and actions.

Billionaires

Why are we allowing billionaires to dictate the daily form of our discourse (*Fox News*, Instagram, Snapchat, *WSJ*, Facebook) and existence? Why are they the only ones allowed to dictate how we will treat the commonalities of our existence, our forest lands, inland and external waters, natural resources, air, water, wind, and wildlife? Why do we allow them to confuse and divide us with the distractions of immigration (we're all immigrants or the sons and daughters of immigrants), color, sexualism, religion, or lack thereof? Why do we accommodate their desire for more of the COMMONS PIE by giving them subsidies (new sports stadiums, coal and oil leases, pollution offsets) to be paid through increases in the national debt our children will have to repay? Why are we letting them turn us against each other and our friends (Canada, Mexico, Europe) and align us with our adversaries (Putin's Russia, Little Rocket Man's North-Korea, Xi's China): where oligarchs rule? If you aren't asking these questions of yourself yet, then you should begin to wonder: what's up? Because United We Stand; divided we fall! And the last time our country did this to itself, it cost us 620,000 (military dead) and 900,000 (civilian dead) in the Civil War.

Is this what we want to revisit as a result of this game being waged between billionaires? Billionaires don't give their lives for their country; they use our sons and daughters for that job. Billionaires don't pay their fair share in taxes; that's why we pay 3% of our total wages into Social Security, while they have made their cutoff rate at the first $174,000 in earnings, and the system is short-funded. Billionaires receive subsidies and tax breaks for their businesses. At the same time, captains of industry earn 40-300 times the average salary of their workers and often receive golden parachutes if they fail to perform. Billionaires couldn't care less about you, me, and our families as long as they can keep us at each other's throats for what's left of the pie after they are done. For this is how they control us! And is this what you want?

We Can Be Better, We Must Do Better: A Call To Arms

Good examples are written all around us!

"All men are created equal, endowed with certain inalienable rights; life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," or that is what we profess in our country's Constitution. The Statue of Liberty embodies the America I believe in with the message: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." (Taken from the Emma Lazarus poem, *The New Colossus*).

Marines, National Guard, and Army units do not belong on our city's streets! Especially on the whims and fantasies of a wannabe despot who has never served and considers prisoners of war (i.e., the late Sen. John McCain) losers. The war in Vietnam ended when the American people, led by our youth, celebrities, veterans, and everyday people, could no longer tolerate the killing and injustices the war perpetuated. That's how I ended service to my country. However, it appears that was not enough, and I wonder if it isn't time to be responsible for a future generation of veterans by encouraging them to uphold the solemn oath they took and preparing them to resist unlawful orders and actions. This is a question all VVAW members should consider.

Cesar Hernandez, joined out of Chicago, IL USMC Hollywood marine/platoon 3077 9/21/67-4/21/70. Vietnam 6/68-7/69, served 7th Comm Bn. RVN, Hill 34, Phi Bai, An Hoa, LZ Stud, honorable discharge Cherry Point, NC. Living in MT 53 years.

Write Your Mother

John Zutz

In the service, there are a number of pieces of advice handed down from older to younger and down through the ranks. First: Don't volunteer. Second: Don't attract attention. Stay anonymous, low profile. Third: Shit rolls downhill. Everyone learns that wisdom. I had already volunteered for Vietnam. The last two, I ensured that I learned all of them the hard way.

When the original members of the 585th Engr (DT) shipped to Vietnam, they all arrived on a boat at the same time. So when it came time for them to DEROS, almost the whole company would rotate at the same time, and their replacements were stuck on a similar schedule. When other replacements and I arrived in early December 1969, most of the old guys had already left. The company was short-staffed and on stand-down, doing maintenance and busy work, such as filling sandbags.

Somehow, a half dozen of us new guys got forgotten one day, and we were left to our own devices. We hung out in the hootch. We managed to scrounge a case of cold beer and a deck of cards. It was a pleasant afternoon. The hootch girl was sweeping and doing her busy work.

Being a nice guy, I offered her a drink from my beer (hey, I'm from Wisconsin—beer is food). She took a few swallows and immediately fell asleep on someone's bunk. We ignored her and kept at our game. We didn't think anything about it till the next morning at formation: "Zutz, report to the Captain." Oh, shit. I've been here for less than two weeks, and the CO already knows my name.

Turns out that Mama-san (the head hootch girl) was offended that we took advantage of her young employee. Luckily for us, we had never touched her. She spent the whole afternoon stretched out and fully dressed, and we slid through on a technicality. A stern warning—never do that again.

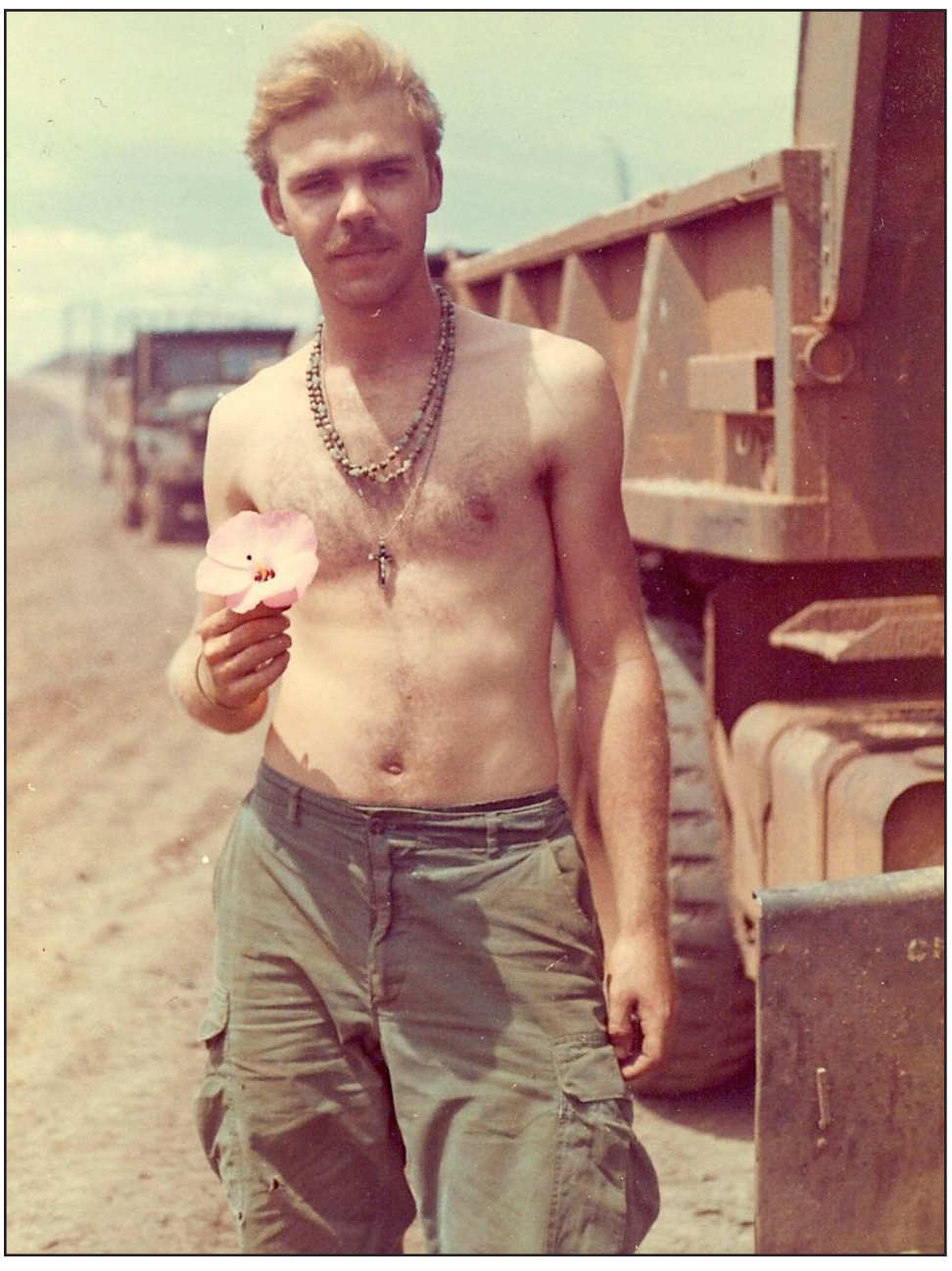
Only a few days later, we were at formation and I heard, "Zutz, report to the Captain." Now what did I do? Turns out this was much worse.

This is where that third piece of intelligence handed down through the ranks comes to play—Shit rolls downhill. Unspoken in this wisdom is the fact that it gains momentum as it rolls and impacts those at the bottom with an unstoppable force.

As I left home on my travels to Vietnam, I told my mother that I'd wait until I had a permanent address before writing, and it would likely be a month or so before she would hear from me.

There was the normal travel time, plus a few days AWOL time, and things got extended. It didn't matter. She didn't listen. She wrote a letter to the Department of the Army. "My son is in Vietnam, and he hasn't written. I don't know where he is."

That's what hit me that day. The Department of the Army is the highest available point, and a General wrote her back, assuring her that her dear boy would write soon. Then he directed the shit downhill, from the General to the Colonel, to the Major,



and on down. It finally exploded in the 585th wardroom, with me standing at attention in front of the Captain's desk with the first shirt, making sure I couldn't escape.

It didn't matter that I'd already written her twice. They demanded I write her again. I paid by being assigned to every dirty job for months. My military career never really took off after that.

John Zutz is a longtime Milwaukee VVAW member.

Putin's Imperial Ambitions in Ukraine Threatens World War III

Mike Woloshin

In 2005, Vladimir Putin characterized the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical tragedy of the century." He also called it a tragedy for the Russian people, going beyond geopolitics:

•The loss of Russian superpower status and influence; the breakup of the Soviet Empire altered the world balance of power.

•It divided the Russian population, leaving tens of millions living outside Russian borders in independent states.

•It resulted in economic devastation, the transition from communism brought severe recession, destabilized finances, destroyed savings and caused widespread poverty.

•It disrupted social institutions, destroyed old traditional ideals, dismantled institutions, and created crises, such as wars in Chechnya and Ukraine.

In marking the distinction between regretting the loss of Russian history and strength and acknowledging that restoration of the Soviet Union was unrealistic and undesirable, he said: "Anyone who does not regret the passing of the Soviet Union has no heart; anyone who wants it restored has no brains."

In 2021, he again lamented the collapse of the USSR as the demise of historic Russia and a major humanitarian tragedy," revealed in the economic hardship of the era. In 2025, Putin stated that with the collapse of the USSR, the West took advantage of Russian weakness by deciding to live by the rules it set for itself and ignoring Russia's interests. His expression of grievance over the loss of great power status and the unity of the "Russian nation." He focused on instability and chaos following the collapse of the USSR, including "separatist movements," economic hardship and a rise in crime, rather than a desire to restore Soviet-era communism.

Russia is the last multi-ethnic empire on the European continent. All others, Spain, Portugal, France, and Belgium have collapsed as a result of movements for self-determination and independent statehood in Asia and Africa, particularly since the 1960s. The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union accelerated those movements with the creation of the independent states including Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Ukraine. The residents of these former "Soviet Republics" are neither ethnic Russians nor do they desire to be part of a reconstituted Russia.

In 1994, under the Budapest Memorandum, the Yeltsin government recognized Ukrainian independence and agreed to respect Ukrainian sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity in exchange for Ukraine giving up its nuclear arsenal. Putin reneged on his government's agreement with the 2014 annexation of Crimea, followed by the February 24, 2022, invasion. Due to determined Ukrainian resistance, the Russian invasion expected to take three weeks, is now in its fourth year.

Putin's threat to start World War III comes not only from "nuclear sabre rattling," but also from launching drones on September 10 which flew far beyond Ukraine to land in Poland and Romania, both of which are NATO members able to invoke "Article 5" of the NATO Treaty ("an attack on one, is an attack on all"). NATO alliance nations have strengthened their Eastern front in response to increasingly aggressive Russian drone strikes. Polish and other NATO aircraft have deployed to protect NATO airspace due to threats of renewed airstrikes along the border with Ukraine. Romania has ordered its forces to shoot down unauthorized drones in its airspace.

Ukrainian President Zelenskyy noted that: "Russian military personnel know exactly where their drones are headed and how long they can stay in the air. Their routes are always calculated. This cannot be an accident, a mistake, or the initiative of some lower level commanders. It is a deliberate expansion of the war by Russia. This is how they operate—small steps at first, and in the end great losses."

It appears that Putin is not waiting for the total conquest of Ukraine before he pushes his Imperial ambitions Westward toward Warsaw, Berlin, Paris and even across the Atlantic Ocean.

Mike Woloshin, AMH-2, USN, ATKRON 86, onbd USS Coral Sea (CVA-43), Vietnam (Yankee Station) 1969-1970. Mike is the grandson of Ukrainian immigrants, a retired Assistant Cook County Public Defender, and active in VVAW since joining in 1971.

Permission to Walk in Peace

Jerry Neece (reviewer)

Permission to Walk in Peace: Stories of Healing from Trauma as Told by Combat Veterans
by G Craige Edgerton (editor), Joe Cotchett (foreword)
(Advanced Publishing LLC, 2025)

Permission to Walk in Peace is a raw and compelling anthology written by eight veterans with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) from combat during the Vietnam War, and how they have chosen to move on, growing from their experience instead of being victims of it. These veterans began writing as therapy and created 106 stories, essays, and poems that artistically recount the process of dealing with their trauma.

Edited by G. Craige Edgerton, a Marine from Vietnam in 1969, *Permission to Walk in Peace* delves into their combat experience, how they dealt with their return to civilian life, and finally, how they came to terms with their trauma.

The first chapter, *Experience*, describes combat and other traumatic events that led to their PTSD. Although graphic at times, those stories lay the foundation and are necessary to understand their recovery, especially for readers with no exposure to combat veterans. But this chapter is not the heart of the book. The more important parts are the second and third chapters.

The second chapter, *Handrails*, refers to the handrails used on naval ships to aid in climbing steep stairs. It is an apt metaphor for the tools veterans used upon returning to civilian life. Too many returned, not as heroes, but rather societal pariahs, resulting in divorce, lost jobs, alcohol and drug abuse, and worst of all, suicide. One story, *The Plan*, details one veteran's attempt to end his life, but in the end, he could not do it. *Another Farewel*l is a poignant poem about self-love conquering fear.

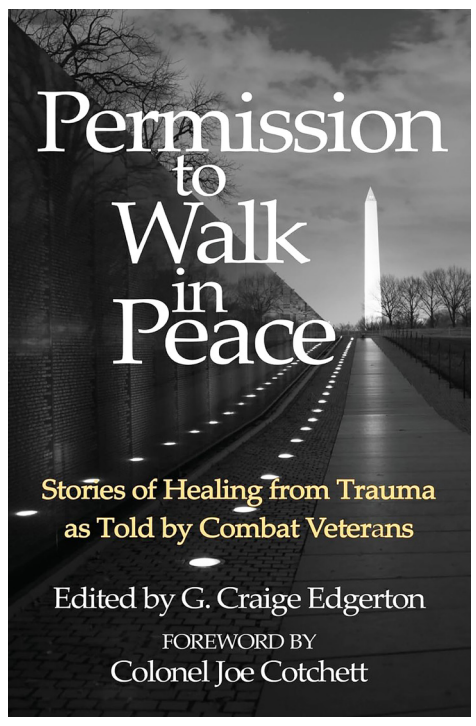
The third chapter, *Mending Fences*, came from a heartfelt story of a veteran helping his elderly father repair a fence, and in the quiet aftermath of reflection, healing occurs for both. All of these veterans have spent too many years trying to mend the fences of the broken experiences of combat.

Welcome Home is a poem of finally receiving a long-overdue greeting from another disabled veteran in a chance encounter. In *Dumpster Diving*, the writer recounts an attempt to destroy any evidence of his time in Vietnam, only to have that evidence recovered in an unexpected turn of events.

Permission to Walk in Peace is not intended to be a textbook for healing, which is better left to professional counselors. These stories are directly from the heart of those eight veterans, uncut and unabridged. Many veterans will understand and connect with these stories, and the writers intend for them to inspire other veterans on their journey to peace. At a higher level, it is clear that their stories can help anyone with trauma, whether they are a veteran or not..

Permission to Walk in Peace is unique in its presentation format, featuring stories, essays, and poems; its emphasis on literary merit; and, finally, its direct, uncensored truth-telling.

Joe Cotchett, one of the top trial attorneys in California and a retired Colonel, says it best: "It should be mandatory reading for every elected public official about what war and conflict can do to those who serve, along with their families and community. The title of this book tells what many veterans, men and women,


Permission to Walk in Peace
Stories of Healing from Trauma as Told by Combat Veterans
Edited by G. Craige Edgerton
FOREWORD BY
Colonel Joe Cotchett

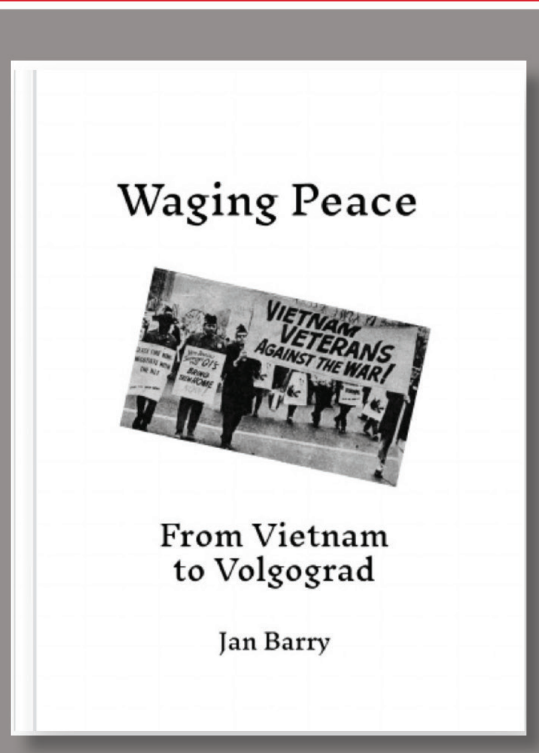
have done for their country—much of the battle is fought in the minds of veterans when they return home to walk in peace."

Jerry Neece, is a Vietnam-era Army veteran, and has been reviewing books, concerts, and restaurants since 1963. He lives in San Jose, California.

Waging Peace: From Vietnam to Volgograd

Waging Peace is a collection of essays, poetry and art by Jan Barry, a Veterans For Peace Poet Laureate and cofounder of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The memoir conveys memorable stories about the transformation of soldiers in war zones into communities of peace activists. Jan Barry is the author of *Waging Art: Tackling Grief and Trauma with Creative Arts,* among other works.

Scan this QR code to order
WAGING PEACE
From Vietnam to Volgograd



Vietnam Today, After 50 Years of Peace, With Other Wars Raging

Nadya Williams

June 19, 2025

Nadya Williams, Vietnamese veteran, and American veteran Hugh Willis. April 30, 2025, Ho Chi Minh City.

Huge parades in Ho Chi Minh City this spring marked the 50th anniversary of April 30, 1975, when a North Vietnamese army tank crashed through the iron gates of the US Embassy in Sai Gon. The military took the lead in the parade, but it soon changed to beautiful peace floats, music, doves, flowers, and thousands of workers and children, along with colorful cultural costumes.

Although Vietnam is looking to the future, the past is always present, and the same is true in neighboring countries, as well. During the so-called "Indochina War," Vietnam, along with Laos and Cambodia, received more explosive power than World Wars I and II combined. It remains the largest aerial bombardment in human history.

Maybe that's why one sign at the massive June 14 protests in the US read "Gaza is Arabic for Vietnam." One wonders how the Vietnamese feel about the US dropping 30,000-pound "bunker-busting" bombs to attack Iran.

Vietnam's transformation since the war's end is reflected in the luxury shops and full hotels, adding to a 7% positive GDP in 2024. Vast income gaps are indeed widening, but quite a few boats are rising as well with the economic growth. In the country's capital city, Ha Noi in the north, new apartment buildings are as tall as corporate towers, with low-income and affordable new housing, too. Tourism accounts for 15% of the boom, as the natural beauty and affordable prices attract travelers.

But there's another element unique to this place, a feature that draws so many to come here. Call it admiration, respect, or curiosity; this element is evident in the fact that the single most-visited place in the entire country, for both foreign and domestic tourists, is the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City.

Three encounters on a recent trip to Vietnam exemplify this phenomenon.

Tour Guide Hong

Hong is a 26-year-old guide at the UNESCO World Heritage Ke Bang National Park, famous for its spectacular limestone river caves. Per Vietnamese social norms, he is married with a young child. Fluent in English and well-versed in the natural sciences, he squires boatloads of mainly young adventurers to several of the cave complexes and the river water park. His knowledge and interests also extend far beyond his country, as he inquires whether America's midterm elections might have a positive impact on the Trump regime's destructive policies.

Promotional material for the caves trumpets the fact that "entire regiments of NVA (North Vietnam Army) troops sheltered in the caves from American bombing during the war." When the subject of the war is brought up, Hong explains that Quang Binh Province has the unfortunate location of being immediately north of the 17th parallel's DMZ, as well as being in the narrowest "waist" of the long coastal country, where the Ho Chi Minh Trail had many branches.

"It was bombed flat," he simply says. His elders have told him of the many civilians who hid in the caves from US B-52 Stratofortresses, and at least one time when a cave entrance collapsed from the firepower, trapping those inside. "The people outside tried so hard to reach them, but after several days, they were all dead," Hong said with genuine sorrow. But the most painful story came after more conversation and acknowledgement of the crime that was the US war against Vietnam.

Hong's voice and expression changed as he revealed his family's story. "When my mother was only 2 years old, her mother was killed in the carpet bombing." So, his grandmother never lived beyond her early 20s, and his mother lost her own mother as a very young child. During lunch in a nearby town, Hong made a point of walking to the back garden to show a 6-foot-tall spent shell, hidden behind a large boulder so that few tourists would notice it. An average of 1,000 Vietnamese are still being killed every year by unexploded ordnance, and 1,300 are permanently injured annually. Hong said some American tour customers don't like it if he talks about the war.

National and party flags with Ho Chi Minh, Ha Noi.

Vietnamese-American Veteran John Nguyen

John Nguyen (not his real name) was conscripted into ARVN (the Army of the Republic of Vietnam), the military of the south, which was created and funded by the United States. He likely had no choice and worked in Sai Gon more in intelligence than in combat. He said some whom he identified as Viet Cong suspects were assassinated.

Exiled to Southern California, he and his wife waited until their two children were out of university and able to move away before he joined the local chapter of Veterans For Peace and marched openly in parades. John chose to link up with Americans who had also fought in the war against "the Communists," but who had chosen to reject their role in what they came to view as an illegal and immoral invasion and occupation of a sovereign country.

John's decision was a brave one, and his family suffered recriminations from the local Vietnamese-American community. Unbeknownst to many in this country, six Vietnamese-American journalists and community activists were assassinated in the US starting in the early 1980s for their "turning against the war."

So strong were John's feelings of guilt and fear that he suffered a heart attack when he first returned to South Vietnam ten years ago. He has recovered, lives a healthy life in southern California, and has since made regular trips back.

A Cooperative for "The Disabled"

In Ninh Binh city, just four hours south of Hanoi, a well-to-do couple has funded a small clinic to treat children and adults with disabilities. They own a large restaurant that is a regular stop for tourists visiting the Trang An Landscape Complex, a series of lovely lakes flanked by towering karsts connected by limestone tunnels, accessible by hand-rowed small boats—another vastly popular tourist spot.

Their first three children are accomplished young adults, but their last child, a girl, has cerebral palsy and stunted growth. The clinic started in 2020 and is now cooperatively run. Of the two dozen who come for treatment and therapy, however, several have the classic bodies of Agent Orange/Dioxin (AO/D) victims.

The chemical defoliant was sprayed all over the south of the country by the US military over a period of 10 years (1961-71) to kill off all the vegetation so that the US military could spot and target North Vietnamese soldiers and National Liberation Front fighters.

Normal-looking, cute children, accompanied by a parent, are seated on mats awaiting their turn to be monitored by a young male doctor and his assistant. By the jerky movements of these young patients, one a baby of just a few months, it is clear to a non-specialist that they were born with cerebral palsy, a result of myriad possible factors. In Vietnam's case, prolonged conditions of war, displacement, and lack of food and medical care weakened entire populations, as war has everywhere throughout the ages.

Additionally, at least three of the adults who come regularly to the clinic are classic examples of birth defects caused by AO/D. One man has a body the size of a 10-year-old child; another, a woman, stunted arms and legs; and another man a disfigured face, perhaps with Down Syndrome as well. It is a reality that those who were exposed to the chemical weapon had children who were affected, now going into the fourth generation.

American veterans now receive treatment and compensation for the effects of warped DNA, but not their children or grandchildren. Needless to say, the Vietnamese victims have never been acknowledged, and with USAID cuts, the meager few who benefited are again abandoned by the United States. A stated goal of General Secretary To Lam of the Communist Party of Vietnam is universal healthcare—ambitious, but achievable by such determined people.

Vietnam is doing well and is making sure it never again experiences invasion and war. There is a gigantic, newly opened Vietnam Military History Museum just outside Hanoi, showcasing literally centuries of combat against invaders, displayed in highly professional exhibits featuring animation, photos, artifacts, ample text, films, news clips, and even entire jets suspended from the ceiling.

The American War is there, too, but now 50 years in the past.

Four months after the April celebration of 50 years since the war's end, Vietnam commemorated the 80th anniversary of their Declaration of Independence on September 2nd in Ba Dinh Square, Ha Noi, with a parade three times larger than April 30th where Ho Chi Minh spoke in 1945 before tens of thousands.

Nadya Williams is a board member of VFP Chapter 160 in Vietnam.

Empowering the Poor Amidst Big Changes in Vietnam

Bhavia Wagner

Sponsored student at her home in the highlands of Ha Giang Province.

Vietnam is currently undergoing significant changes in its government.

In February 2025, Vietnam's National Assembly approved a massive government restructuring with the goals of reducing bureaucracy and creating a more efficient and responsive government.

Starting in July, the Vietnamese government implemented its largest administrative reform since the country's reunification in 1976. The number of provinces and centrally-run cities was reduced from 63 to 34. The district level of government was abolished, leaving only provincial and commune-level governments. The number of ministries and government agencies was reduced from 22 to 17.

The restructuring is part of a broader anti-graft campaign. By streamlining ministries and eliminating layers of bureaucracy, authorities aim to enhance transparency and reduce corruption.

These changes mean that we are now working directly with the Vietnam Women's Union at the provincial level instead of the centralized government in Hanoi. These administrative changes do not affect our two humanitarian programs of 1) education for poor rural girls and 2) micro-credit for women who are living in rural poverty.

We are continuing to work in the remote mountainous Ha Giang Province, one of the poorest rural provinces. This province is located in the far north of Vietnam, on the border with China. It is hard to make a living in this rural area with its rugged terrain. Most families are farmers who grow corn or rice.

Ha Giang Province is an impoverished area where children typically drop out of school to work on the family farm, in road construction, or to get married at a young age.

This year, with the help of the readers of *The Veteran*, we donated $9,640 to these programs of education for rural girls and micro-credit for women.

The students are from indigenous ethnic groups, including Dao and Hmong. The school principals and local teachers select the students for our program. Girls are chosen because they are more disadvantaged than boys. Most of the children have just finished primary school, and with our $9,640 gift, we can support 15 girls all the way through high school graduation.

Our funds are distributed to students by our partner organization, Platypus, a non-profit organization from Australia that provides aid to Vietnam. Volunteers run Platypus in Australia, with one part-time staff member in Vietnam. The founder of Platypus, Bob Greer, travels to Vietnam each year to visit and monitor our programs.

Each child receives $100, which covers school supplies, a school uniform, and some food for their families. Statistics show that education for girls is one of the most effective ways of ending poverty. When women are educated, they can earn more and improve their children's lives by providing better nutrition, healthcare, and education.

We are also providing micro-credit loans to poor women in Vietnam. Rural women living in Ha Giang Province are using our funds to start income generation projects, usually pig raising, which helps improve their family's living conditions. The average loan amount is $400 and has a two-year term. The recipients are mothers with children, and the extra income from starting their small business changes their lives. As they transition from extreme poverty to successful businesswomen, they become more respected in their communities, and their self-esteem improves. They are happy because they overcame poverty through their own effort, with the help of our loan.

The poor in Vietnam have limited access to credit, and usually their only option is to borrow from unethical private lenders who charge very high interest rates. Sometimes, villagers are charged double what they borrowed. Poor people are therefore reluctant to borrow because they lack confidence in their ability to repay their debt.

Our loan provides enough money to build a pen for the pigs, get the piglets vaccinated, and buy proper feed to get started. The pigs roam freely during the day and come home at night for food and shelter. By the time the loans are due, two years later, the family may have had three to four litters of pigs with up to eight piglets in each litter. With their extra income, the family may buy shares in a cow or horse, start raising ducks or chickens, or build a fish pond, which increases their income even further. Each successful loan recipient must pass on a baby sow to a new loan participant.

Women's economic empowerment is one of the best ways to end poverty, along with girls' education. The micro-credit program we are part of has helped 440 women and their families out of poverty.

Please help us provide support to these two programs. One hundred dollars will support one child in school for one year. Funds that are reserved to help the child in future school years, all the way through graduation, will be temporarily used in the women's microloan program. We make excellent use of your gift.

Donations of any amount are most welcome and will be a tremendous help. You can send a check to Friendship with Cambodia, PO Box 5231, Eugene, OR 97405, or you can donate online at *friendshipwithcambodia.org*. Donations are tax-deductible.

Friendship with Cambodia is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that has been providing aid to Cambodia since 2003. Friendship with Cambodia's founder, Bhavia Wagner, has been volunteering to help Vietnam since 1992, as an act of friendship and reconciliation.

Bhavia Wagner led friendship tours in Vietnam for Global Exchange in 1992 and 1994. She is the director of Friendship with Cambodia and author of Soul Survivors: Stories of Women and Children in Cambodia.

Micro-loan recipients, staff from the Vietnam Women's Union (front), and Platypus founder Bob Greer.

Loan recipient with two piglets

THE VETERAN
SECTION C
Volume 55, Number 2 Fall 2025

Remembering Jack Elder

TOM WETZLER

I first met Jack in 1979 at a small meeting in San Antonio of people concerned about issues in Central America. We soon realized that we were Vietnam Veterans. I had been involved with VVAW since 1970, but had never met Jack before. Jack was knowledgeable, well-spoken, and willing to pitch in with the grunt work of meetings and mail-outs. It seemed he was too good to be true. I was suspicious. In the next few weeks, I learned he had been in the Peace Corps in Costa Rica before being drafted and sent to Vietnam. Originally from CT, he first came to Texas for Peace Corps training in 1965 after getting a B.S. in Biology from Catholic University in Washington, DC (Jack later told me he realized that if the 16mm films about the "benefits of Capitalism" did not work in the Peace Corps, there was the M16 of the Army in Vietnam).

In Vietnam, he was assigned to a convalescence unit as a lab tech in Cam Ranh Bay. After returning from Vietnam and out of the Army, Jack finished an M.A. in education with a concentration in Spanish from what is now Texas State University. When we met, Jack was working as a math teacher at a middle school. He was married with three small sons (another son and a daughter came later). His wife, Diane, was fully supportive of not repeating Vietnam in Central America. Their life values of simple living and conscious non-consumerism, "Live simply so others may simply live," showed they were the "Real Deal."

Jack's experience in Central America and his fluency in Spanish gave him empathy for the plight of refugees from right-wing dictatorships in Central America. He worked for several months at Casa Oscar Romero, a refugee shelter sponsored by the Catholic Church, in 1983. During that time, Jack was arrested twice and convicted once of transporting refugees to the bus station.

While awaiting trial, Jack often spoke publicly about US policy in Central America and the creation of refugees from that policy. It is estimated that between 1981 and 1990, almost one million fled from El Salvador and Guatemala, many seeking Asylum in the US. Jacks' actions morphed with the grassroots faith-based Sanctuary Movement.

Jack Elder and Tom Wetzler, MLK Day, 2017.

In 1985, Jack was convicted of charges related to transporting immigrants and was sentenced to two years' probation with the condition that he not publicly speak about immigration issues. Jack refused the sentence as "unacceptable" and continued to speak. A week later, he was given another sentence: 150 days in a Halfway House in his hometown of San Antonio. When released, Jack continued as a VVAW member, speaking at rallies and demonstrations, in classrooms, and participating in lectures at universities.

Jack had participated in going to the office of our Congressional Reps., both in San Antonio and with VVAW in Washington, DC, during Dewey Canyon IV in 1982, before going to Casa Oscar Romero. He returned to teaching, but after 9/11, his conviction became a hindrance to his work in education.

Jack then worked in other fields, including construction, tree trimming, and safety engineering. He volunteered at a homeless shelter, Catholic Worker House, and did daily food deliveries for Meals on Wheels.

Jack continued to do this work after his diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease in 2011, due to Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam. He managed his illness well as it progressed, staying involved and active in both National and community events. But progress it did, and in true Jack fashion, as he was becoming less able to function, he decided once again to take control of his life on his own terms.

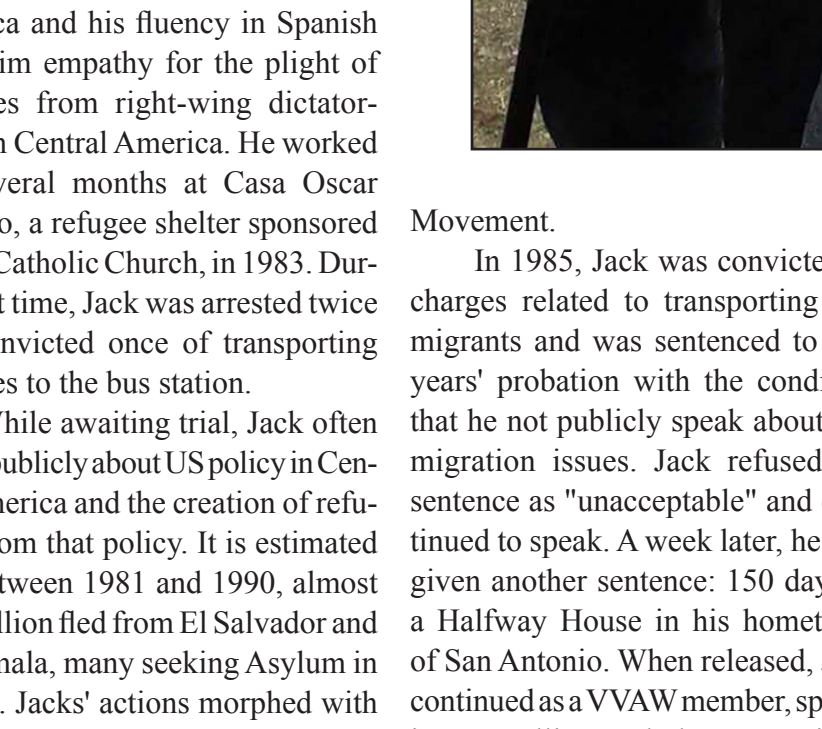
A couple of weeks after helping me with reading the Declaration of Independence in the community park, on the Fourth of July, Jack decided to stop eating and drinking and let nature take its course. He was surrounded by his family when he passed; it was his instruction to be cremated in his VVAW t-shirt. "America doesn't need to be a great nation, it needs to be a good Nation."

Jack was a true friend and comrade, always having my back.

TOM WETZLER IS ORIGINALLY FROM NYC, WAS A MEDIC WITH AN INFANTRY COMPANY D 1/18, 1ST INF. DIV. 69-70 AND HAS BEEN INVOLVED WITH VVAW SINCE LEARNING ABOUT OPERATION RAW IN 1970 WHILE VOLUNTEERING WITH A GI NEWSPAPER "YOUR MILITARY LEFT", IN SAN ANTONIO, TX. HE WORKED IN NURSING, TEACHING, AND VARIOUS OTHER JOBS, AND IS NOW RETIRED IN SAN ANTONIO.

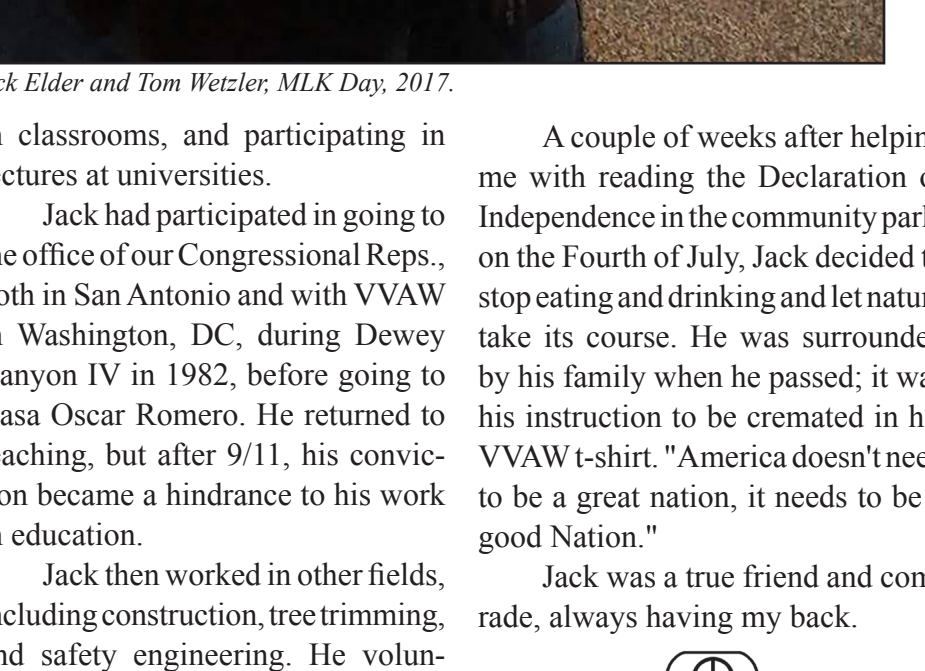
VVAW Member Helps Refugees,_

VICTORY IN SANCTUARY TRIAL



Jack Elder and Stacey Merkt

From an article in the Spring 1985 issue of The Veteran.



Jack Elder (in shades) with VVAW in Arlington National Cemetery, Dewey Canyon IV, May 1982.

Jimmy in Saigon

Sarah Axel

An Interview with Peter McDowell, filmmaker, Jimmy in Saigon.

Jimmy in Saigon is a heartwarming documentary film directed by Peter McDowell about his older brother, Jimmy, who served in Vietnam, returned there after his discharge, and died there while Peter was still young. During the film's production, Peter discovered a story that helped his family communicate more openly and gain a deeper understanding of Jimmy's life.

The film has been shown at over thirty film festivals and has been voted "Best Documentary" over ten times.

I met Peter at a reunion event at our high school, the University Laboratory High School (Uni) in Champaign-Urbana, IL. Like me, Peter is too young to have had peers subject to the draft, but the Vietnam War profoundly changed his family. I had the chance to interview him recently.

Q: When did your brother graduate from high school, and when was he drafted? With what unit did he serve and where?

Peter: He graduated from Uni in 1965 and then enrolled at the University of Chicago that fall. He dropped out of the University of Chicago near the end of his junior year in the Spring of 1968 and was drafted later that year. He served in the Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) of the 20th Engineer Brigade, Long Binh.

Q: How old were you when he left for Vietnam? And when he died?

Peter: He left for basic training in 1969 and for Vietnam in 1970. I was born in 1967, so he was really gone for most of my childhood. I was five years old when he died in 1972.

Q: What did you know about Jimmy growing up?

Peter: He was sort of a combination of a hero in our family, as well as being a taboo subject—a name not said out loud but only whispered. Everybody loved him—I knew he was smart and funny, but we weren't really supposed to talk about his death. It was all considered a tragedy.

Q: When did you decide to investigate what actually happened? Did you plan to make a movie about Jimmy from the start of your investigation?

Peter: I thought about making this kind of movie since the 1990s, when I took a film and video class in grad school at the University of Wisconsin. I created some short films in the 1990s that achieved success at film festivals. In 2010, when I began working on *Jimmy in Saigon*, I initially conceived it as an oral history project with my family and his friends. However, it quickly became clear that it could stand on its own as a documentary film.

Q: As I recall from the film, at the start, you had only a photo of Jimmy with another guy on the beach, a couple of letters from Jimmy, and a letter from a girlfriend in Vietnam. How did you know where to start?

Peter: I read all of the letters that we had. My mom was a meticulous saver of nostalgic objects (a pack rat!), and she had all of the letters he ever sent her. One of his friends also saved Jimmy's letters. I tried to piece together his life based on the letters and other clues. I got on the internet and made phone calls, contacting people like mad. My goal was to interview (on camera or off camera) everyone who had ever known him.

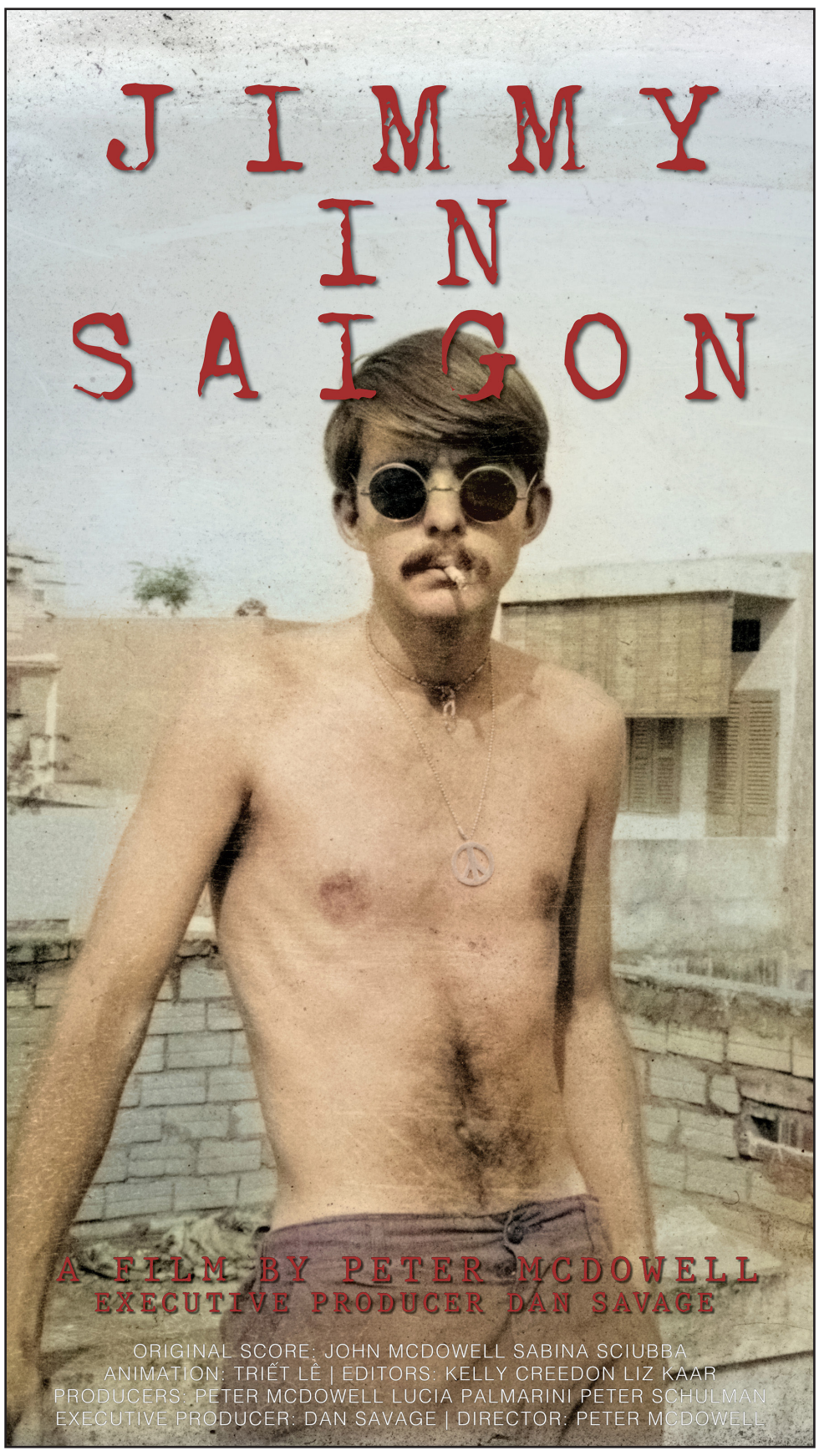
Q: You traveled to Vietnam several times to make this film. Tell me about those trips.

Peter: My first trip was in 2016. I was looking for Vietnamese people who knew Jimmy around the time of his death, and I wanted to walk in his footsteps. The trip was overwhelming, in a good way. I loved the country and its people, and I had a really wonderful crew. We got a lot of great footage and made progress, but we didn't crack the mystery we were hoping to solve. Then, in 2018, I discovered the answer to an unsolved issue that helped me envision finishing the film. This allowed me to return to Vietnam in 2019, where I was able to interview key subjects and film important locations. I hope to return to Vietnam soon to visit and, hopefully, to screen the film.

Q: Overall, the story you uncovered about Jimmy was very different from the story your family had before your investigation. In addition to learning why he had returned to Vietnam after his discharge, you also discover that the cause of death listed on Jimmy's death certificate was incorrect—he didn't die from a drug overdose. You also found people who knew your brother and loved him as if he were family.

How did your discoveries and the making of *Jimmy in Saigon* change your family?

Peter: I think the very notion of talking openly about the truth, and not hiding family secrets, was the core of this journey for my family. We are


JIMMY
IN
SAIGON
A FILM BY PETER MCDOWELL
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER DAN SAVAGE
ORIGINAL SCORE: JOHN MCDOWELL SABINA SCIUBBA
ANIMATION: TRIẾT LÊ | EDITORS: KELLY CREEDON LIZ KAAR
PRODUCERS: PETER MCDOWELL LUCIA PALMARINI PETER SCHULMAN
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: DAN SAVAGE | DIRECTOR: PETER MCDOWELL

getting along better than ever, partially because we are committed to being open, supportive, and honest. The nature and cause of his death remain murky to me. I have evidence that he was a heavy drug user, and I do believe that contributed to his death from a bacterial infection.

Q: Do you think Jimmy's story has a particular message for Vietnam veterans?

Peter: Perhaps the message is that it's never too late for healing; it's never too late to talk about things that happened 50 years ago. It's good for the heart and soul to purge secrets, seek the truth, and look for emotional honesty. And don't be afraid to reach out and try to locate those lost friends from way back then, long ago.

Q: I found the film intensely touching and uplifting and would encourage people to watch it.

Peter: Thank you so much—that means so much to me!

Jimmy in Saigon is now available to rent or buy on multiple platforms, including Apple TV, Amazon Video, and Prime Video. To see a screening, check www.jimmyinsaigon.com To arrange a private screening, contact peter@petermcdowell.com

Sarah Axel is a reader of The Veteran. She is from Urbana, IL, and graduated from Uni High (University Laboratory School) in 1977. Too young to have had peers in the service in Vietnam, she was old enough to remember the nightly Vietnam War news and the campus protests. She will soon be taking a trip to Bangkok, Laos, Cambodia, and Ho Chi Minh City.

Surviving the Long Wars

Meg Miner (reviewer)

Surviving the Long Wars: Creative Rebellion at the Ends of Empire
Edited by Aaron Hughes, Ronak K. Kapadia, Therese Quinn, Meranda Roberts, and Amber Zora.
(Bridge Books, 2024)

There are at least three ways to read *Surviving the Long Wars: Creative Rebellion at the Ends of Empire*: as a catalog of an exhibition featuring multiple artistic expressions, an account of a conference, and a critical analysis of the impact that US-led militarism has had on indigenous peoples and cultures across the globe.

The American Indian Wars and the Global War on Terror (GWOT) are the specific "long wars" mentioned. The first is described as "a series of violent conflicts from the 1600s to the early 1900s, marked by land theft, forced relocations, and efforts to eradicate indigenous cultures." The GWOT "represents a contemporary phase of US military terrorism in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa marked by invasions, occupations, and counter-terrorism operations and perpetuating violence and destabilization in these regions." Highlighting the continuity of imperialist US tendencies throughout these two eras, as well as the individual and community-wide resistance, through art and other forms of activism, is at the heart of this effort.

The book is an exhibition catalog, but a remarkably ambitious one, just like the conference it describes. As noted in the introduction, the volume: "transcends the conventional exhibition catalog; it is a clarion call to bridge differences, reject imperialism, and envision a future shaped by peace and justice. By centering on the lived experiences and radical creativity of those most impacted by US imperialism, this book highlights the transformative power of art to inspire, heal, and unite communities in their ongoing struggle against war and militarism. For veteran artists, this requires shifting from alliances based solely on military experiences to coalitions rooted in solidarity with other targeted and impacted communities."

Containing images of visual and performing arts, essays, and poetry, the book transports readers through the experiences of their creators to these historic periods. Some of the essays are first-person narratives of the authors' experiences during and after the wars, and some examine the origins and impacts of military actions on all the affected people. The points of view of both civilians and military combatants bring their visceral experiences to readers who can glimpse the consequences of US military actions through their eyes.

The March 16-19, 2023, Veteran Art Triennial & Summit took place in three Chicago venues: The Newberry Library, Hyde Park Art Center, and the Chicago Cultural Center. The website remains available at *https://www.survivingthelongwars.online*. This was the second summit, and organizing for a third is underway.

Tying the exhibits and the conference together are the commentaries in the form of essays and poetry. There are four sections in the 350-page volume: *Residues and Rebellions, Reckon and Reimagine, Unlikely Entanglements*, and *Surviving the Long War Summit*. Each chapter features an introductory essay and poem. While full-color images of the artworks are common in catalogs, the photographs are presented in a way that makes the reader feel as though they are walking through the galleries. There are also close-up photos that show details of the work. These detailed images highlight aspects

of the commentary and situate the artworks within a specific historical context.

The first three chapters mirror the themes for the first three days of the conference. The concluding chapter features additional photographs of performances and panels, poetry, and commentary on some of the discussions and the summit as a whole. Included in these are discussions about veteran art and anti-war movements in light of the ongoing suffering in Gaza. At the end of the summit, participants commemorated the 20th anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq with a final sharing of experiences, "visions of peace shared by war-impacted people," and a silent reflection as participants dropped flowers in Lake Michigan.

The events described in this book surely had a lasting impact on the participants, and thanks to the care taken by the editors, contributors, and designers, readers will continue to learn about the origins and effects of the never-ending tradition of US-sponsored long wars.

Meg Miner retired from the Air Force after a career that spanned the post-Vietnam War era and the Gulf War era. She was happy to leave all that behind and start a new life, pursuing degrees that would lead to a career in libraries and archives. Miner found a home in VVAW for her identity as a veteran after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. She started participating in VVAW events in 2002 and joined the Board in 2017.

Always Resisting

John Bromer (reviewer)

Always Resisting: Choosing Prison Over Vietnam and Awakening to American Racism
by Eric Newhall
(McFarland, 2024)

This is one of my two favorite books that I've reviewed for *The Veteran*—the other is *Southern Voices*, a 68-page (in English) collection of oral histories from Biet Dong fighters. Look it up!

"If you want a just society, your life will be a permanent struggle."

Eric Newhall's family moved to Portland, Oregon, one of the whitest cities in America, in 1955, when he was 10 years old. There were no Black students in his elementary school or high school—none. Very few Latinos or Asians, either. When he was 14, his father, a Philosophy Professor, took him to join a "sympathy protest" at the Portland Woolworth's. (A month before, four Black students in North Carolina had been beaten while asking to be served at a Woolworth's lunch counter). A racist mob was taunting the 20 or so Portland picketers. Later, Eric's father asked him what he thought about what they had participated in. It was the beginning of his political and social awakening.

Through high school and into college in 1963, Newhall became more interested in the Civil Rights movement. Socially awkward but athletic (MVP in high school basketball), he felt isolated as an English major. In a college History class, a Professor ranted about "American Imperialism" and Vietnam in particular. Newhall went to the library to find a refutation of the Professor's opinions, only to realize the guy was right.

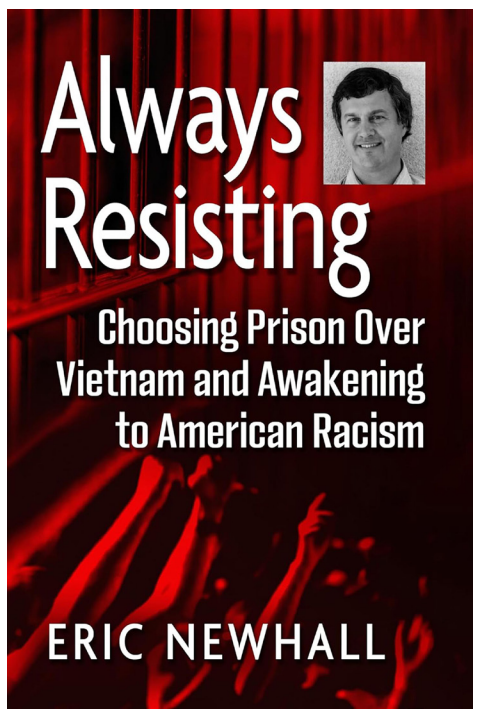
As he continued college, he realized that being drafted was a possibility. Not a pacifist, applying for CO status was out, and he decided to refuse induction if it came to that. In August of 1968, it did.

Eight months later, he was sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment. After a short stint in a county jail, he was transferred to Lompoc Federal Prison, shortly before his friend Dwight, another draft resister he had met.

This book explains a lot about prison—the different groups, the "race riots" that the guards liked to see because it kept the inmates fighting each other instead of the administration, and significantly, the basketball courts, which were white, Black, and "Indian" by choice. The white guys were lousy except for Newhall and Dwight, known as Bigfoot. They soon tired of playing with the white guys, but the Blacks kept to themselves, until one day the best Black player asked, "You boys want to play some hoop?"

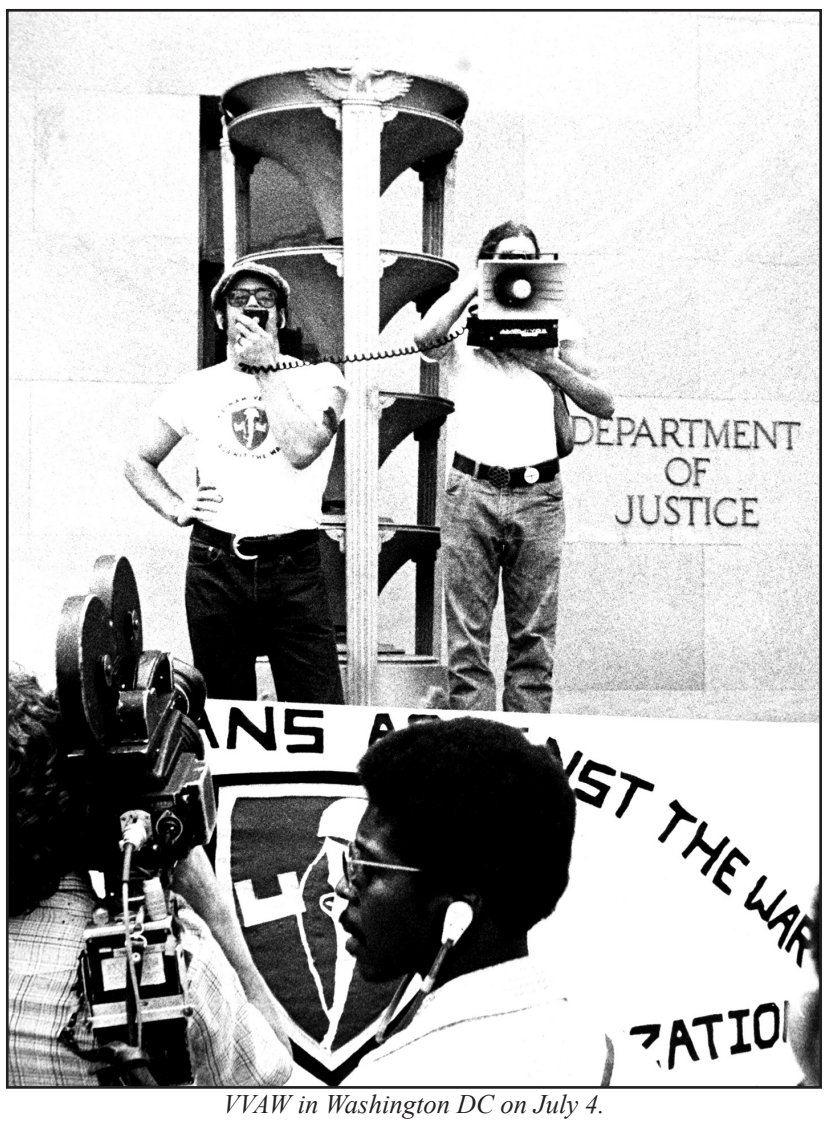
That broke the ice. The guards, of course, did everything they could to interfere and make trouble, but gradually the inmates started organizing to resist.

That eventually led to a strike, time spent in the hole, and long, deep conversations with Black and Latino individuals, ultimately fostering a sense of brotherhood. After the strike ended, however, many men were transferred to other facilities.



I could go on, but you'd get much more from reading this book. One hundred eighty-eight of its 212 pages cover Newhall's education in life and prison, the last 24 are titled *Epilogue*. After being released, Newhall earned a Ph.D, married, and taught American Literature college courses for 44 years.

The book was published in 2024. It's a fucking education reading it, and a LOT of fun. Don't take my word for it; get it!



VVAW in Washington DC on July 4.

John Bromer is a Life member of VVAW, refused induction in 1969, got deported from Canada the same year, joined the Army rather than spend 2 years in the slammer, and got discharged after Basic because of an allergy to bee stings. Funny that New Haven didn't care about his Doctor's letter stating that.

I Was Arrested for the First Time in My Life … And It Was Worth It

Chet Hill

When I learned that Veterans For Peace was organizing a protest in Washington DC on the day of the orange taco's ridiculous parade, I was immediately all in. Tell me more! I wanted to participate, as did over a hundred veterans from around the country. Many from as far away as California. Our group was joined by About Face: Veterans Against the War for this protest.

Everything was extremely well organized. We were instructed to wear camo shirts (or "blouses" as they are now referred to) so we would present a united front at the protest sites. All protest signs were prepared in advance; we were told not to create any homemade signs, as they would be provided for us. We were all given protest t-shirts as well.

The plan was for an organizational meeting to take place on Friday, in advance of the parade on Saturday. My wife and I drove to DC on Thursday, expecting to arrive in time for an organizational meeting on Friday. Upon arrival, we learned that the Saturday protest, in advance of the parade, had been cancelled and rescheduled for Friday—I presume for security reasons.

As it turns out, this was a good thing. The new protest locations, were the Supreme Court Building and the Capitol Building. Given that most of the attention was focused on the Saturday parade, our protest received considerable attention. CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, *The Washington Post, Newsweek, Time*, and all local news stations, etc. As such, it was a very successful protest.

On Friday morning, we all met at the Palestine Freedom House to receive instructions, prepare for our protest activities, hand out the shirts, and grab a bite to eat. Emphasis was placed on this being a nonviolent protest. And it was. We simply wanted to make our points.

From there, we walked to the Supreme Court building for a press conference. Several veterans spoke about the reasons they were participating in this event. Many shared their stories of the emotional battles they faced between what they had been ordered to do and what their conscience told them to do.

After the press conference, we made our way to the Capitol Building for a photo-op. Barricades had been erected to keep us from advancing to the Capitol itself; however, there was an opening in the barricades at the very center. So we went for it. We didn't need to move anything, but in the rush, the barricades came down.

Once a couple of us got through, the rest flooded after. There were definitely more of us than Capitol police, but after we got through, they immediately sprang into action. Within minutes, a dozen or so police cars arrived along with many police officers. In retrospect, I'm guessing that they were concerned that this might be the beginning of another January 6 Capitol attack, so they responded in force. Obviously, it was not, and it didn't take them long to realize this.

I would like to emphasize that, for the most part, the Capitol Police were very professional. They didn't manhandle us. They didn't deride us for doing what we were doing. They helped us when we needed help getting in and out of their vehicles, etc. They were simply doing their job. I actually got the impression that they understood, and maybe even supported, our mission.

After sitting on the steps and chanting slogans for an hour or so, we

were lined up, zip-tied with our hands behind our backs, frisked, stripped of all items that we had on us, and ultimately transported to a holding warehouse to be processed. One officer was assigned to keep a grip on us at all times. One of the items that they removed from me was my belt. It was tough to keep my pants up with my hands zip-tied behind my back! We ended up being zip-tied for the next 12 hours or so, and believe me, those things are really uncomfortable over time. We had been advised to carry only an ID and $50 in cash for bail. No phones.

When they snatched our banner and our flags and began to take us into custody, I went along without a fight. Our objective had been met. The mission was done.

At the processing location, we were frisked again (for the fourth or fifth time) and then waited forever. After they finished processing us, we were sent for mugshots and fingerprinting. All told, we were arrested at approximately 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon, and I didn't get released until the sun was coming up the next day.

In summary, I am very proud to have participated in this protest. What's happening right now in this country is not good. Trump and his administration are out of control. Our goal, our purpose, had nothing to do with violence. We simply wanted to share our message with the world.

What we did on Friday night was our patriotic duty. I'm not sorry for what we did. Our action was very different from what took place on January 6, and anyone who tries to compare these two events is willfully deceiving others. Because of what happened on January 6, our protest was even more important. We were there to challenge everything that the insurrectionists and their leaders stand for.

Using our bodies and our voices to confront and challenge what is happening in our country peacefully is perhaps the most American thing that a person can do, and I'm proud that I was part of it.

Chet Hill was in Vietnam in 1971 and joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War while he was still stationed in Vietnam. He has been a member ever since.

The Wall

A war that officially wasn't
weighs on my generation ...
like a stone.
Some have been bent
as it sat on their souls.
Some have been crushed
and miss parts they were born with.
Some have choked
on the hard bits dusted-up.
Some have attempted
to make heavy seem light
hoping to dislodge its weight.

Still it sits, a stubborn beast
that blocks the way to US,
we who did and we who didn't
believe
fight
march
bleed
rescue
run
leave
live
loose
die.

Now a wall of polished stone-
too long, too filled with names too young-
reflects our time,
becomes a shrine
where fingers tracing letters
etch memory into stone,
and where, like salted memories,
tears can fall,
seep into our cracks,
erode the jagged edges of our shared years
becoming stones to pave a way...
maybe enough to build a bridge.

—Eva Hagenhofer

Connect the Dots

Terrorism is violence
With a political goal
War is politics
By other means
War is
As Oscar Schindler noted
A chance for
Failed businessmen
To redeem
Their failures
To get rich off
Someone else
Many someone elses
Dying somewhere else
A long tailpipe
So profit happens here
And death happens there

—Carl Nyberg

Hope

E.C. Streeter

Like everyone in my infantry platoon, I was constantly torn between wanting to be there to provide whatever support I could for my buddies and wanting to get out of the bush and spend some time in the rear where I could sleep on something other than the ground and eat something that might not have come straight from a can. A month or so before the end of my Vietnam tour, I was chosen to spend a couple of days in the rear to attend a servicemen's show starring Bob Hope. While I had nothing at all against that particular comedian, I'd managed to develop a bit of a short timer attitude, which led me to say to my company commander, "Thanks, that's great, but could I also get that dental check-up that I've been requesting for at least the last month and a half?" Needless to say, this bit of insolence infuriated him, and that was the last time I was ever offered anything in the way of a perk for having been there longer than some of my fellow grunts.

Connecting the dots between my time as a medic and my later work as a circus clown is one thing I've never had much success with. However, there is the obvious fact that both endeavors involved daily travel under frequently difficult circumstances. It's also perhaps worth mentioning that I received several favorable notices over the years for my portrayal of a nurse assisting a demented dentist in a tooth-pulling gag. Then again, the smiles that resulted just could be a link of sorts.

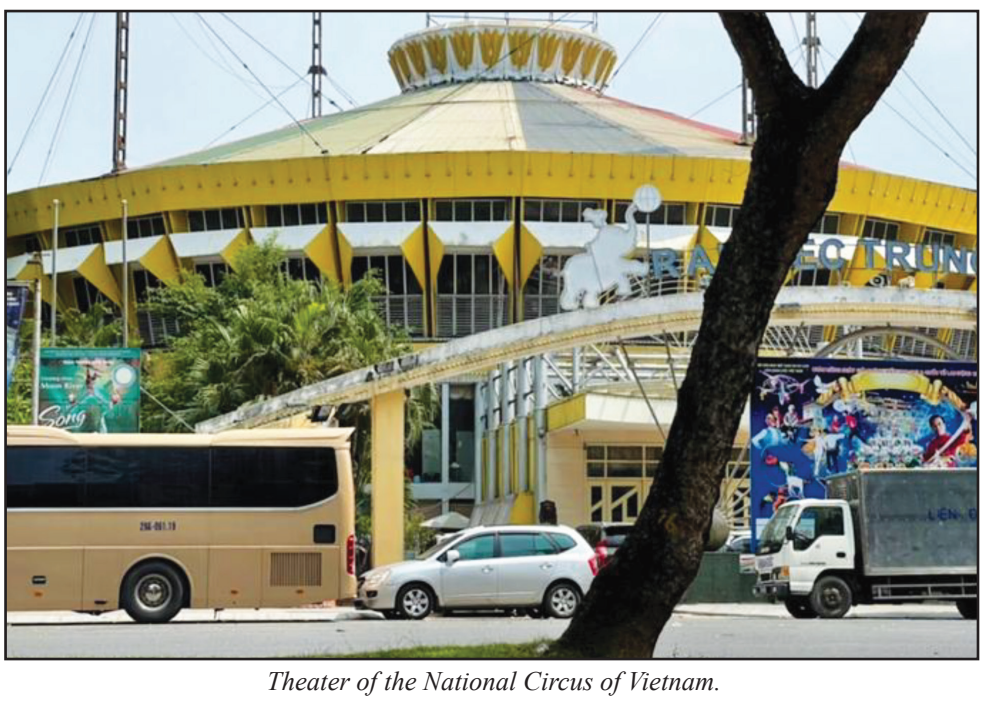
Most of the time, we were assigned to free-fire zones in a region near the city of Hue, and so we didn't get many opportunities to spend time in villages. However, occasionally, one would be on our route, and I'd conduct an impromptu clinic. The children were always the first to see us, and when I told them that I was a "baksi," they would immediately rush off and spread the word. Soon there would be a line of people, most of whom were youngsters waiting for that most fascinating of panaceas, the band-aid, or elderly people who tended to have stomach troubles or irritated eyes. The ailments were rarely serious, and usually the band-aids, antacid pills, and tubes of eye ointment that I kept in my rucksack were sufficient. A few of the complaints were undoubtedly of the imaginary sort, but in any event, each encounter invariably ended with a wordless exchange of smiles.

Through these and other small experiences, I developed an affection for the Vietnamese and their country, and fifteen years later, I began having vague thoughts about wanting to see for myself how the people were managing to recover from the horrific trauma that I, as a representative of my government, had been in part responsible for. When I happened to read that Vietnam had a national circus, my thinking evolved into something more along the lines of attempting to connect at least a few more of the dots. Almost on a whim, I sent a proposal for a "vet-turned-clown-visits-circus-in-Hanoi" article to a few newspapers, and amazingly, an editor at *The Washington Post* expressed interest. Press credentials duly arrived by fax, and I proceeded to book a flight to Hanoi.

Even my translator was not all that certain about the location of the circus arena. He'd dealt with plenty of journalists who wanted to see a performance of the famous water puppets, but I was the first to inquire about the national circus. Fortunately, the words "rap xiec" were all our taxi driver needed to get us there. It was located in Lenin Park, approximately a ten-minute drive from Hoan Kiem Lake and the business district. Round and slightly wider at the top, with statues of lions on either side of the entrance steps, the building resembled a cross between the Guggenheim Museum and the New York Public Library. Inside, its sixteen hundred seats were so steeply raked around the single ring that I almost had the feeling of being inside a giant teacup.

Along with an act featuring bears native to Vietnam, one of the more notable acts was a rola bola act in which the performer stood on a board balanced by a cylinder and then added layer after layer of boards separated by glass tumblers filled with water.

"I used to do that act." Tam Chinh, the director of the circus, told me. "And now my daughter, Le Kim Cuong, is performing it in the show. She recently won an award at the Asian circus competition in Pyong Yang." After the show, we walked through the circus's "back yard," where I got to see the next generation of bears waiting for their moment in the spotlight. Chinh then took me to a meeting room with a wall filled with photographs. She pointed to a couple of shots of herself from her performing days and then to an older black and white image of a group of children, which included her sitting on the floor around a beaming older gentleman who happened to be Ho Chi Minh. She went on to tell me that the circus was celebrating its fortieth anniversary, having started in 1956, and that it was more profitable than any other state cultural organization, including the water puppets. She also mentioned that they had done tours of Thailand, Holland, Sweden, and Taiwan.



Theater of the National Circus of Vietnam.

While I was certainly interested in what she was saying about the circus, there was something else I wanted to talk to her about, but I wasn't quite sure what it was. And then the memory of my missed opportunity serendipitously came back to me.

I asked her if the circus had ever performed for the troops. "Oh, yes," she replied, "in 1971 we spent two months going to some of the places where the fighting was and doing shows for the soldiers. We performed in Than Hoa, Nghe An, and Ha Tinh provinces, and also on the Ho Chi Minh Trail." I then asked her how they traveled, and she said that they went by bicycle with their wardrobe in rucksacks and their equipment strapped on as best they could. A mental image of Mr. Hope pedaling a bike with a microphone stand slung over his shoulder flickered briefly. "Sometimes we were attacked during shows. Then we had to run into the tunnels and switch from being artists to being ammunition carriers and things like that. A few times we cooked for the soldiers while they were fighting, and sometimes we sewed for them. We also performed in hospitals for the wounded."

Another thought occurred to me as I listened to her, but I decided to leave it unmentioned: 1971 was the year that I was there.

It came as no surprise that the *Post* did not find the article I filed to be acceptable. Elicited smiles were hardly the kind of journalistic thread that they were used to dealing with. No matter, I was soon caught up in preparing for a series of Shrine circus dates in Syracuse and Rochester.

My trip was only ten days long, and from my limited experience talking to Tam Chinh and a few people in the Hanoi neighborhoods I walked through, I'm afraid that I didn't get a very clear sense of how the population was faring in general. One thing I can say, though, is that I probably came as close as anyone to meeting the Vietnamese Bob Hope.

E.C. Streeter is a retired high school English teacher. Before working as a teacher, he spent seven years as a clown for Circus Odyssey, Hoxie Bros. Circus, and Rudy Bros. Circus, among others. He served as an army medic from June 1969 to May 1971. This essay was initially published in a somewhat censored form in the November-December 1996 issue of Destination: Vietnam.

All I Have Left Are Rhetorical Questions

Jim Wohlgemuth

When I read in *Stars and Stripes* about the protests at the Pentagon, I was pretty sure. When I got out in September of 1972 and started meeting some other Vets, I was very sure. Then, when I watched the fall of Saigon in 1975, I was absolutely sure. I was sure that our boomer generation, and the experience we had either in the war or protesting it, would never let it happen again. Us Boomers understood, by experience, the futility and criminality of what we were ordered to do. I was positive that as we grew older and gained power, we would never send our youth overseas for futile, mindless conflicts.

Oh my God, words can not capture how wrong I was. Us boomers, with all our knowledge and experience, let it happen again. How did this happen? After all, we were in a truly unpopular war at home and over there. After all, so many of our friends were getting killed with no seeming end in sight. After all, we had seen the pictures of a naked little girl, a victim of napalm. After all, we were aware of My Lai. After all, we had seen Kent and Jackson State. After all, we had seen the Veterans throwing their medals away and testifying at the Winter Soldier hearings. After all, we had seen the horrible debacle of desperate people trying to escape as Saigon fell. Our generation had seen it all, and yet here we were. Did our generation forget that quickly?

Us Boomers understood, by experience, the futility and criminality of what we were ordered to do. I was positive that as we grew older and gained power, we would never send our youth overseas for futile, mindless conflicts.

I truly have no idea what happened. Maybe we were co-opted by that Coke commercial. Maybe, because Vietnam was so unpopular, it was easy to forget the trauma (but that doesn't make sense). Maybe it was the evil of capitalism in cahoots with the military-industrial complex. Maybe it was embarrassed politicians looking to fix our Vietnam legacy.

I don't know, but what I do know is that the political leaders we elected along the way rarely had Vietnam service either there or on the streets protesting here. There were a few: Tom Hayden, John Kerry (who is a prime example of being co-opted), John McCain (who had good days and bad days), and Bernie (who was a conscientious objector, God Bless his honesty then and now). However, look who we elected. Bill Clinton took off for Oxford, while George W. was on a binge with the Air National Guard, dealing with bone spurs and an STD, and Trump. And so many more, just look at those old guys in the Senate, is there a Vietnam Vet? Shumer, Graham, McConnell, Cornyn, Grassley?

What did we do? Why couldn't we remember? Why couldn't we make the public remember? Surely all those kids at Woodstock didn't end up on Wall Street or at Raytheon. Were we so glad to put it behind us that we decided (with important exceptions, such as VVAW and VFP) to stay quiet? Was there enough of us embarrassed by our loss that we were willing to sacrifice our sons and daughters to make amends, only to find ourselves in subsequent mismanaged profit-driven wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and now facing who knows what? Were our voices silenced (like Phil Donahue and others)?

Why couldn't we get this misguided empire to stop? Sorry, this has been a lot of questions and no answers, but this nags me no end. I thought we were so smart. We are still getting in the way of progress. I guess all we can do is get out of the way. I suspect the Millennials and Gen Z will not mind as they reach for that mop to clean up the mess we left them.

Jim Wohlgemuth was on the USS Westchester County LST 1167 from 1969 to 1971. He was on the USS Point Defiance LSD 31 from 1971 to 1972. He is a retired Federal employee and Middle School Social Studies Teacher. He is co-host of the Veterans for Peace Radio hour on Radio Free Nashville.

Scorpions' Dance

John Ketwig (reviewer)

Scorpions' Dance: The President, the Spymaster, and Watergate
by Jefferson Morley
(St. Martin's Press, 2022)

Scorpions' Dance is an interesting book, an account of the decades-long relationship between President Richard Nixon and CIA Director Richard Helms. Those two men made a lot of history, from the very beginnings of the Cold War through the Bay of Pigs invasion, the assassinations of JFK, MLK, and RFK, and ultimately the Watergate affair. They didn't trust or particularly like each other, but the enormity of those historical events required them to work together, and they usually got along except in private meetings.

The author uses quotations to paint vivid pictures of these two personalities, as well as many other famous politicians from that era. What becomes evident is that Richard Helms was highly respected in Washington, a brilliant, charming, and well-dressed celebrity who was often invited, with his wife, to important State dinners and social events. Helms became Director of the CIA after the volatile eras of Allen Dulles and John McCone. He was considered a super spy and totally committed to the CIA and its "covert" operations opposing Communism around the globe. He could be counted upon to maintain silent secrecy and to defend his people and old friends.

Nixon, on the other hand, was intensely passionate about his pet projects, and he expected his associates to be loyal and silent. Nixon was not known for being friendly to his staff, and few trusted him. They had learned to be discreet and secretive, and to view existing laws as obstacles to be overcome, no matter if they had to bend or ignore the rules to accomplish their missions. Still, circumstances made it necessary for Helms and Nixon to work together. The author quotes several informal notes that Helms sent to Nixon, and I came away with the impression that Helms was an accomplished kiss-ass. There is no record of Nixon's reactions to those communications, but it seems that Helms realized Nixon's need to be praised and stroked by his associates.

It seems that Helms went above and beyond in telling the President exactly what he wanted to hear, and that he didn't really agree with Nixon on many issues. At the same time, he was instrumental in the planning and implementation of the assassinations and regime changes in Iran, Argentina, and Guatemala (and possibly Dallas!) and obscuring the illegal activities of the CIA in those incidents with no regard for morality or the rule of law.

Scorpions' Dance is an intriguing book. Author Jefferson Morley is a highly respected Washington journalist. Throughout the book, you can't help but wonder how he gained access to sensitive documents, and also to the contents of many private conversations. Throughout years of significant and historic events, he tells us what Nixon's associates felt about many of his various international projects and interactions. Still, I came away from the book feeling frustrated that there was really nothing new to be learned about those important years or events.

Nixon is pictured as obsessed with efforts to maintain an impenetrable wall of secrecy around both the Bay of Pigs operation and the assassination of President Kennedy. Having read a number of books on those subjects, I was disappointed that I learned nothing new from *Scorpions' Dance*.

When a team of Nixon's "plumbers" was arrested during a break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate building, Nixon expected to keep the White House's involvement secret. Obviously, Helms was misled, but he was all too eager to tell lies himself to create international havoc that would, he thought, impede the growth of Communism anywhere in the world, and especially in the western hemisphere.

Of course, he saw the Vietnam era anti-war movement as a Communist conspiracy, and didn't hesitate to take action against the protesters. If the overseas voters had elected left-leaning candidates, Helms felt perfectly justified in directing efforts contrary to international laws to prevent any expansion of Communism. His CIA spooks were justified and encouraged to assassinate those "Communists" who were gaining influence around the globe. The book is riddled with covert plots to assassinate Fidel Castro, among numerous others.

Sadly, that's just scratching the surface. The real value of *Scorpions' Dance*, if the author is to be believed, is the matter-of-fact and emotionless presentation throughout the book of instances where government and CIA intelligence personnel lied, both to other government agencies, to high-ranking officials, including the President and other White House staff, and to the Press, which in fact means they lied to the American people. The author does not express any surprise or bitterness at finding this almost universal disregard for the truth. As an experienced Washington journalist, he appears to take it for granted, and that in itself is scary.

Scorpions' Dance offers up a lot of familiar names and telling insights into some well-known historic events. There is no smoking gun revelation, but the book is a powerful description of the inner workings of our government and the unraveling of our American democracy.

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW, and the author of ...and a hard rain fell, A GI's True Story of the War in Vietnam, and Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter.

Red

Tony Cokely

I can't remember your name. I wonder if I ever knew it. Actually, there are a lot of things from those years I don't remember. All I remember is that you had red hair and I didn't like you much. I tried to find your name on the Vietnam Wall. I hoped something would ring a bell when I went through the Marines who had died at the right time and place to be you. I also hoped to find nothing. There was one name that caught my eye. Ironically, the listed cause of death was "accidental homicide".

If I killed you, it was an accident. I didn't like you, but not enough to kill you. It is hard to remember we were both boys with very little time in-country or in combat. I mean, we were in Vietnam for, at most, a year on our first tour, so neither one of us could have been there very long. I thought of you as older because you were there when I arrived. That is not fair. I was one of the oldest Marines there, except for the officers or lifers. I was 22 and older than half of the Americans killed, who were 18 years old.

It was June or July 1970 when I was sent into the bush. Trucks took us off Highway One and dropped us at a rice paddy dike with a broad path on top. I was the low man of four on the second machine gun team. I was the second ammo humper, and you were the first ammo humper. We walked away from the road and were nearing an intersection of patty dikes when there was an explosion that took out our team's machine gunner and the assistant gunner. I didn't know their names, and they were gone.

Our platoon leader consolidated the remaining machine gun team members, and you became the assistant gunner, and I became the "first ammo humper". A few nights later, a VC or NVA patrol walked into our position while we were digging in for the night. We were digging sleeping holes on our side of the perimeter when all hell broke loose.

The shout came, "Machine gun up". Our new team leader took the M-60 to the other side of our perimeter and opened up with it. Shortly afterward, the shout came, "ammo up". You handed your belts of ammo to me and told me to take them to our gunner. I was thinking, "You are the assistant gunner, you take it up". When I wouldn't take it, you threw a belt of ammunition towards the gun. Then the confusion was over, it seemed that the enemy had blundered into our position on their way elsewhere.

A few days later, I became the assistant gunner. You were gone, and I was moved up. I never saw you again. I wish I could ask someone what happened that night. Days later, the gunner was injured, and I became the second team machine gunner. All this happened during my first 45 days in combat.

The night I beat you, we were in a night position after walking all day, and we were on 50% watch. Half of the platoon stood watch while the others slept. You drew first watch, but I saw you keep falling asleep. I got up and told you I would take first watch. You slept for several hours, then I woke you for the second watch. For some reason, I didn't trust you to stay awake, and I kept checking on you. Each time I checked, you were asleep. I kept waking you and telling you to stay awake. You still kept falling asleep. I was really tired. It was way past midnight.

I hope I warned you. I hope I told you not to fall asleep again, or else. I could have even said that more than once. I would like to believe that. Anyway, I finally fell asleep and then woke to find you sleeping again. It is hard to articulate what happened next. I think that was when I lost whatever was left of my innocence. I took my helmet, jumped on top of you, and began to beat you. And just now, when typing this, I started to type "I took my helmet, jumped on top of you, and beat you to death".

You see, this is my dilemma. I never saw you again. I was now the assistant gunner, and you were gone. The best way I can describe my actions is that I went into an insane rage. I don't remember much after the beating started. I certainly don't remember anyone stopping me or questioning me about what happened. I know others were afraid of me afterward. I can't remember anything else about that night. Some people have suggested you were likely court-martialled for sleeping on watch; rather than that, I killed you. I hope that is true.

Whatever happened, you were just a boy and deserved none of what you got, including the beating I gave you. I had never done anything like that before. I never knew I had that sort of rage reaction in me. I was like a pit bull in a ring fight. How can this be me? I am a gentle person. I never wanted to be a Marine. I never wanted to be in a fight. I didn't want to be in Vietnam, and I certainly didn't want to hurt anyone. I didn't know I was capable of such things. But now I know I am capable of anything. That scares me. I won't have a loaded gun where I can get to it because of what I am capable of.

Who would think I could attack another human without regard for the consequences? I'm sorry I hurt you. I hope I only hurt you a little, and it got you away from that shitty little war. I hope the beating just caused you to be transferred to the rear. Maybe you had some laughs about how you were safe and dry, and I was up to my ass in the mud, muck, blood, and gore.

I guess I have to forgive myself for what happened. Maybe I can do that. What I don't think I will ever be able to do is to feel safe that I won't have that same savage rage. I worry about that often.

I don't like to think of myself like this, but in the words of Popeye, I guess "I am what I am". I'm sorry for any harm I may have caused you. I hope you survived the war whole and had a good life. I lost my innocence, and I truly miss it. It is hard to explain to those who were not there.

Tony Cokely was drafted into the Marine Corps and served from 1969 to 1971. He retired after 29 years as a government employee, proud union member, and officer. He lives in the California foothills.

VVAW East Bay Chapter office, January 14, 1974.

Five Names on a Granite Slab

Tom Farley (reviewer)

Five Names on a Granite Slab
by Charles Nothe
(self published, 2021)

Every town, every neighborhood in any city, should have a writer like Charles Nothe. In the last pages of his book, he says his only regret is in not writing this book sooner, and with that, there's an obvious warning: if you know someone who didn't return and have a desire to mark the memory of life cut down far too early, then know the time is running out to write something. It doesn't have to be a book, maybe just an article or a short piece for a newspaper.

Two men died in Quang Tri Province and my private memory of the place goes back to winter of 1969 when I spent a few weeks there and remember leaving on a convoy during a mortar attack and thinking the people down here, (as opposed to Da Nang or Hue) are extremely angry at the US and I wondered if something happened that I hadn't heard about. The My Lai incident occurred in 1968, but it wasn't reported until 1969. Alan Berry was an Army medic who stepped on a booby trap, and Peter Nash was a Marine, only eighteen years old, like too many men on the Wall.

Michael Scanlon, also a Marine, was awarded the Silver Star after he held back several North Vietnamese soldiers, and when they threw a grenade at him, he fell on it to absorb the explosion. Scanlon received the most medals, and people who knew him weren't surprised, since he was five feet tall in socks and determined to try harder than anyone else. This was evident in his becoming a Recon. Captain Ken Berube was the oldest vet on his list, who died at age 23, when the recon plane he was piloting was shot down near Chu Lai. His body was listed as MIA for a short time, and later, they acknowledged his death was body never recovered (BNR). I've done some research on MIAs and know the number was greater than it ever should have been. A big percentage went down over water and should have been listed as KIA, but were labeled BNR, like Ken Berube.

This book features six veterans, each with a story of their life. Like the Wall in DC, names had to be added later, as with many memorials. Sgt. Carl Rattee was cut down in the Battle of Phan Thiet after Tet in 1968. Yes, reading this book gave me the Blues, but then the thought occurs to any vet, we have a reminder to be grateful and smile, for we made it when others weren't so lucky. If you ever feel you need a reminder of why you're opposed to war lately, make it personal by taking a name from the 58,000 on the Wall and say you're anti-war because of him.

Timothy Farley was with the 1st Marine Division in Vietnam from November 1967 to October 1969.

A Disturbing but Welcome Change of Perspective: From The Vietnam War to The American War

Mike Budd

I was drafted out of grad school in July 1968, just a few weeks after Bobby Kennedy was killed and a few months after Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed in April of that year. After basic training and along with other draftees who had at least some college, the Army offered me the opportunity to reduce my chances of dying or being maimed in Vietnam by enlisting for three years and attending a months-long class to train us to repair IBM key punch machines. Of course, virtually all of us college boys chose to save our asses, even though very few of us used the skills the IBM technicians had taught us when we got to Vietnam or wherever we ended up. Instead we drove trucks, filled sandbags, or worse. However, we could utilize those skills working for IBM after we left the Army. With their big fat Army contract, IBM was training hundreds of keypunch machine repairmen on the taxpayers' dime so they didn't have to pay for all that training themselves, socializing their expenses and fattening their profits. My introduction to the military industrial complex.

When I finally got to Vietnam in November 1969, I was a clerk typist in a Signal Corps message center for 365 days in the vast US base in Long Binh, working twelve-hour shifts, writing daily letters home, listening to rock and roll at night, and getting an even wider view of the American military industrial complex. I had few interactions with the thousands of Vietnamese who came onto the base each day from Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City)—educated, middle-class women who worked in our air-conditioned office, maids who cleaned our rooms and sold us pot and other stuff, or men who did the shit work in kitchens, motor pools, and everywhere else. Even when we were on guard duty, a line of ARVN bunkers lay in front of our bunkers, making the war seem more distant, even to us. "Vietnamization" of the war, designed among other reasons to reduce US casualties, also meant that more Americans could live in a relatively insulated American bubble of distraction and escapism, with American consumer culture and increasingly powerful drugs. We were in Vietnam but not really in Vietnam, and couldn't wait to get back to "the world." Our half-joking wish fulfillment fantasy, already a commonplace about the GI experience of the war, was that we were really in the jungle in Louisiana or somewhere else in the southern US

As Americans, we were invited to imagine that we could dominate the war and the Vietnamese people while still half-living in our own portable consumerist world. These were the privileges of empire, even one that was coming up against its own limits. It was their country, but they were living in our world, which we imagined we could impose almost anywhere we chose. We brought the American empire into our heads along with all our stuff. Even the critical and enlightening literature I read in Vietnam, including *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night*, seemed to bring America's viewpoints and problems with them to Vietnam.

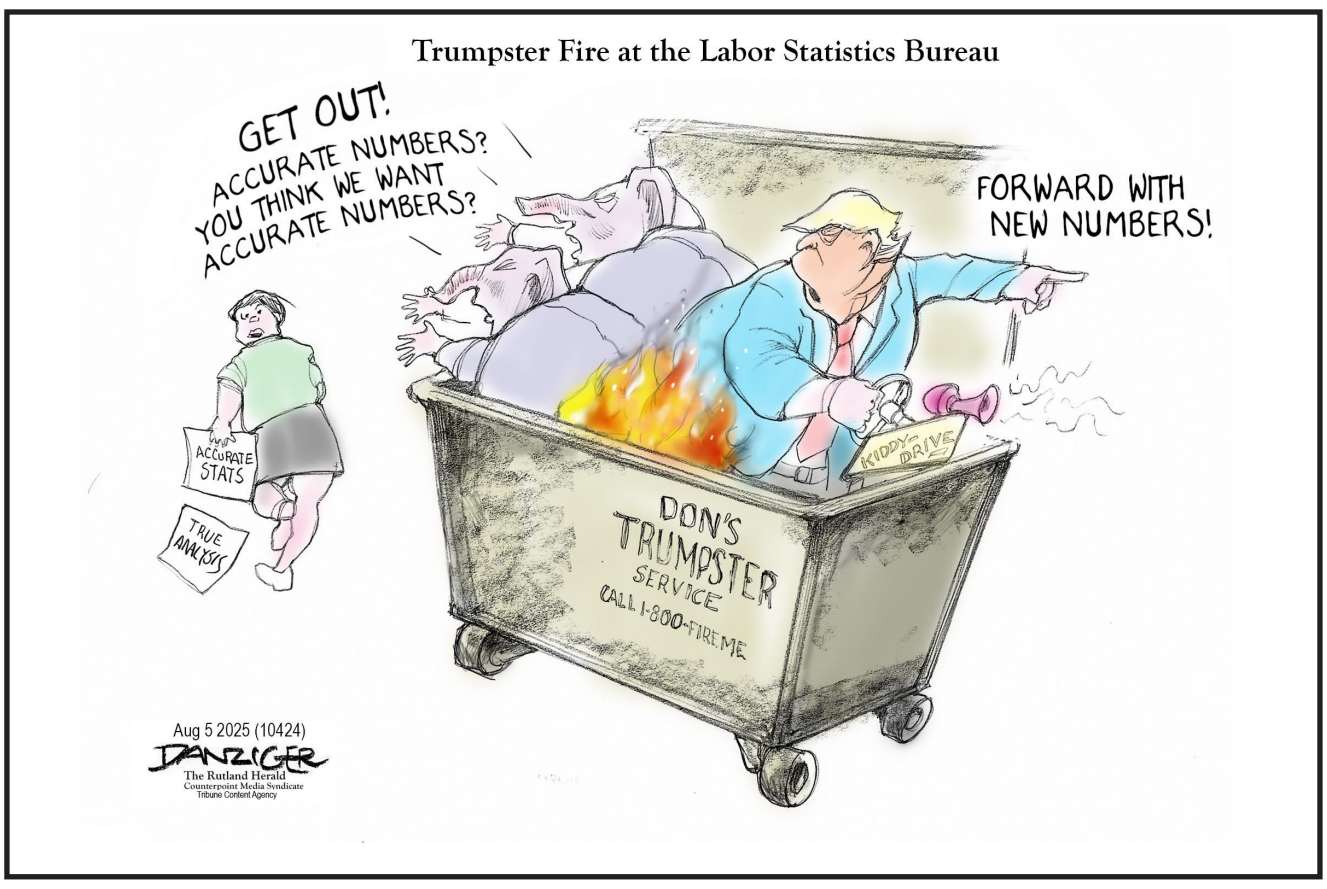
Like many American vets, I gradually developed some critical distance on the Vietnam War. In my case, I was teaching film and media studies at a university (Florida Atlantic). I could learn and teach about the war, partly through the films and other media about the war that I assigned. I began in the seventies, when the war was still fresh in Americans' minds, with an analysis of news coverage of "the living room war," including Walter Cronkite's famous post-Tet Offensive verdict on the war in 1968 that seems to have influenced LBJ to decide not to run for President again that year. Anti-war documentaries like Peter Davis's 1974 *Hearts and Minds* and Emile de Antonio's 1968 *In the Year of the Pig*, the latter of which was startled by incorporating some Vietnamese Communist viewpoints. Over the years, among the best documentaries on that war that I've taught are, in addition to the two above, *Sir! No Sir!* (2005), about the anti-war movement in the US military during the war, and Barbara Sonneborn's *Regret to Inform* (1998), about American and Vietnamese women as widows and combatants in that war. While the latter stood out by including the experiences of Vietnamese women, virtually all the films I've seen and taught have limited themselves to an American (or Western) perspective.

Fifty years after the end of the Vietnam War, more Americans may be ready to see that war from Vietnamese perspectives, understanding it as the American War, a war against Vietnam and most of its people. And this change of perspectives, allowing us to experience Vietnamese viewpoints in multiple ways, clearly has special resonance for us, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, who have struggled our whole lives against the forces that sent us into that war. For most of our lives, the political and cultural battles among Americans over the American War in Vietnam have been fought without the voices and viewpoints of Vietnamese or others. Now that is changing.

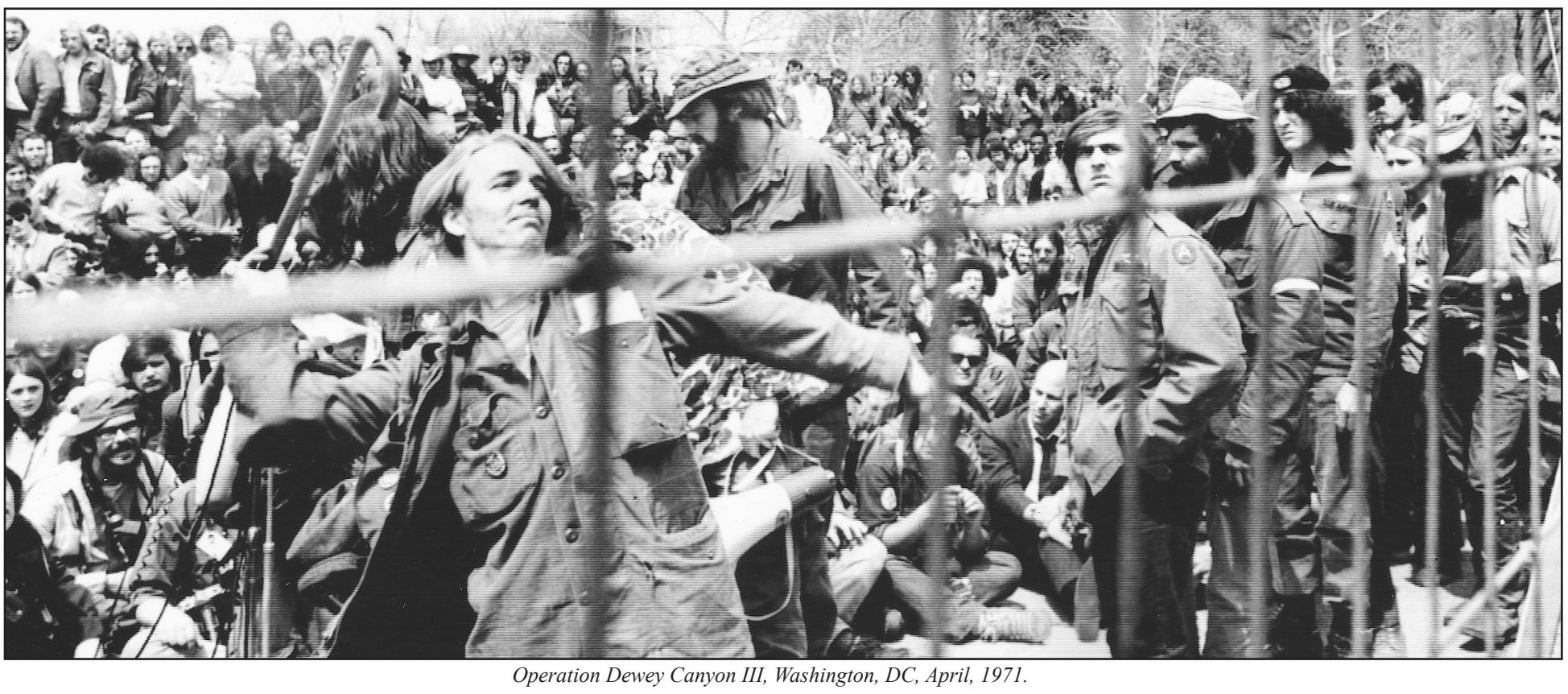
The seven-part television series *The Sympathizer* premiered on HBO in April 2024, bringing a disturbing new perspective to US and Western audiences on what is usually referred to in the US as The Vietnam War. Here, US and Western viewers see, for many, for the first time, that war from the viewpoint of the Vietnamese. Based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of the same name by Viet Thanh Nguyen and created by the South Korean director Park Chan-Wook (*Oldboy, No Other Choice*) and the Canadian actor and writer Don McKellar (*Last Night*), the series, like its source novel, centers on a Captain in South Vietnamese military intelligence who is also a spy for the Communist North Vietnamese. Framed by the Captain's repeatedly revised voice-over narration written in a postwar North Vietnamese reeducation camp, the story follows mostly Vietnamese characters through the fall of Saigon in 1975 to their resettlement as refugees in Los Angeles in the late seventies, the making of a Hollywood film about the war, and the Captain's return to Southeast Asia and the narrative's conclusion.

A fuller consideration of the series itself is beyond the scope of this essay. I have written more about the series and its historical context in a longer essay in *Jump Cut*, an online journal of contemporary media. I strongly recommend the whole series, and also Viet Thanh Nguyen's novel. His other fiction and nonfiction works are great reads, too.

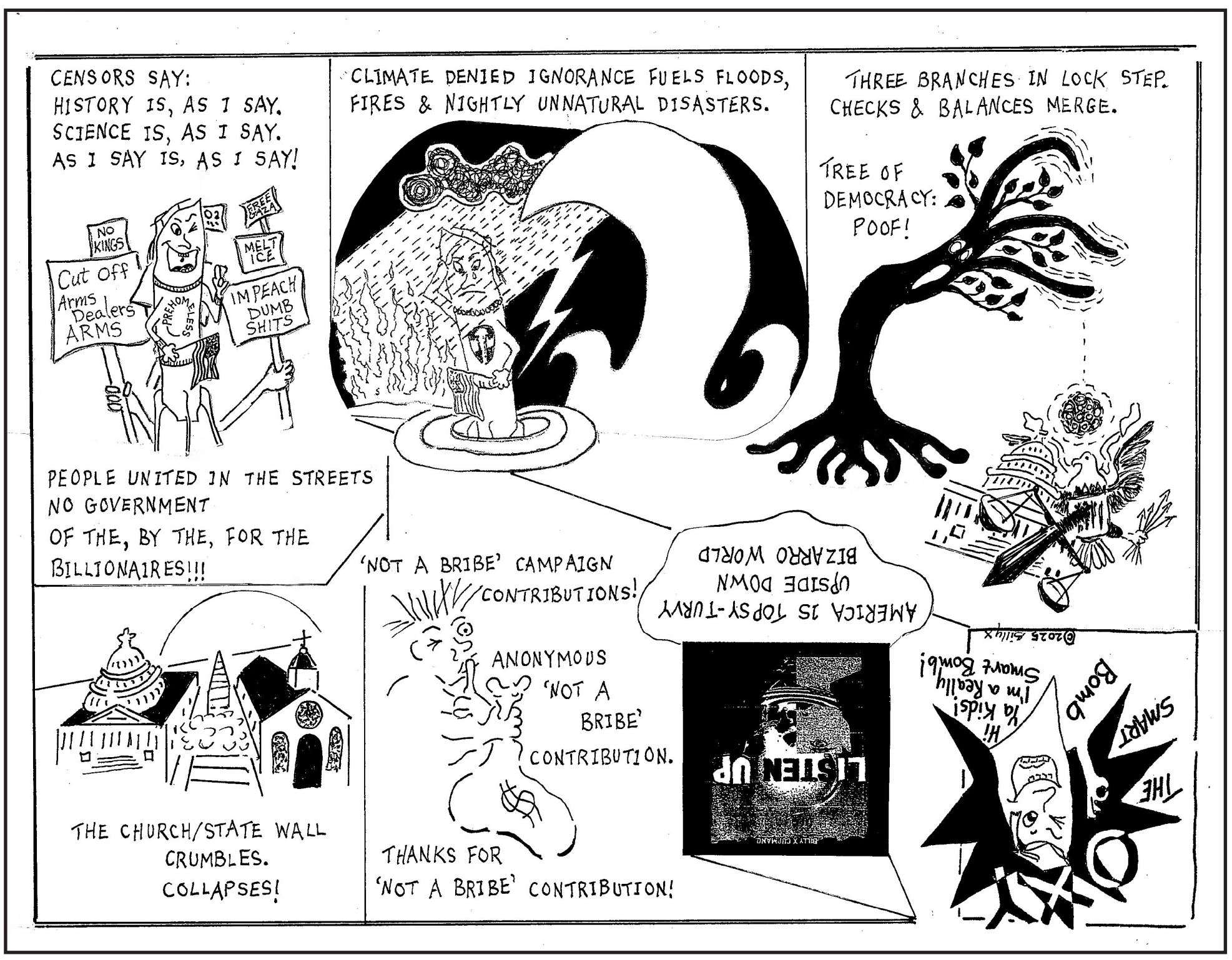
Mike Budd, a longtime VVAW member and retired professor of film and media studies at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, is active in union and other progressive groups and has led The Truth Project, a counter-military recruiting group in Palm Beach County, Florida.



Our Nation's Flag With The Cost Of Freedom by James Wachtendonk.



Operation Dewey Canyon III, Washington, DC, April, 1971.



Comments or suggestions? Contact Billy at billyx.net@gmail.com or visit him online at www.billyx.net.

THE VETERAN
SECTION D
Volume 55, Number 2 Fall 2025

Waging Peace: From Vietnam to Volgograd

JACK MALLORY (REVIEWER)

Waging Peace: From Vietnam to Volgograd
by Jan Barry
(www.lulu.com, 2025)

I started reading *Waging Peace* in July. By the time I began writing this review, the importance of veteran voices in the public sphere was once again evident, as armed National Guard troops had been imposed on Washington, DC, with threats of imminent military control of Chicago and other cities and states.

First impression: it's a tome! Big (8.5x11, an inch thick. 106 chapters, 300 pages). Prose, poetry, photos.

However, I'd say you can feel free to read it from beginning to end without any commitment. It's a melange of topics, some of which may grab an individual reader, some of which may not. It's a leaf through it, scan the chapter titles, read what grabs you, pick it up a different day, and see if other chapters grab you, kinda book.

A resource, not a history—though plenty of history is involved.

I'm a Vietnam vet, a VVAW member since 1970, and subsequently a high school teacher and college professor. Along with my efforts against the war in Vietnam, I have worked against US military intervention in Central America, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. After 30+ years in classrooms, I look at *Waging Peace*, how it addresses issues that have concerned me for decades, and think about how I'd use it in a course. And in what course? Take the second question first:

Book title—*Waging Peace* might be the course title. How Jan and a myriad of other peace activists, mostly veterans, worked to make peace happen—waged peace, around the world. Yes, mostly peace in Vietnam, but also Korea, the Middle East, Central America, Eastern Europe…

Not just wheres but hows. Peace waged in written prose, from Jan's own essays to Eisenhower's Farewell Address, to A.A. Milne's (yes, the author of the Winnie the Pooh books) *Peace with Honour*, as I learned in reading *Waging Peace*. Peace waged in poetry, again from Jan's own work to Bill (W.D.) Ehrharts' and Dan Berrigan's.

Hows in examples of peace waged through actions, including a strike by Jews in the first century AD against the orders of Emperor Caligula; a 1943 demonstration by the non-Jewish wives of Jews in Berlin; the non-violent general strike in El Salvador in 1944 that drove a military dictator from power; and the victories of peaceful actions that that toppled Communist regimes in Eastern Europe in the 1980s.

As you might be starting to realize, this is a very wide-ranging book. These topics are treated in brief, though pithy, chapters of a few pages each. It can make for quick reading, slowed by focusing on people, places, and events that may grab each reader according to their own particular interest hooks. It is a melange of topics and genres that both introduces the general subject and allows for focus on details.

Which is, then, the reason that I suggest the use of this book in the classroom as a topical intro to the waging of peace. I imagine a classroom of students who might be fulfilling a general education requirement, or picking up some literature or history credits to augment their business or engineering education (OK, yeah, this is a liberal arts/social science guy being snotty). The instructor would assign particular chapters for the whole class to read and subsequently discuss. But each student would then also be responsible for X number of self-chosen chapters and an essay explaining why they were chosen, what the student believes their importance/interest to be, and why. Given time, extra credit could be given to students presenting their essays to the class.

This would make the eclectic nature of Jan's chapters suitable for a class of students with wide-ranging interests, allowing them to tailor the chapters to their personal curiosities.

The best way to quickly understand the breadth of topics Jan covers is through a review of his section and chapter headings.

The book begins with an excellent preface by Tara Krause, like Jan, a former West Pointer whose life also led her to live life as a peace activist, as she puts it. Krause shapes an understanding of Jan's multitude of themes.

Sections:

Protesting the War in Vietnam
Preventing Nuclear War with the Soviet Union
Trying to Stop Another Senseless War
Creating Peace

A few of the 106 chapter titles, chosen because they reflect my own special interests in the great variety of topics:

Birth of an Activist
Vietnam Veterans Speak Out
VVAW's Legacy
Poetry vs. War
Uncovering War Crimes

Jane Fonda and the Vietnam Culture Wars
Returning War Medals to Congress
John Kerry Marches On
A Key to Waging Peace: Soldiers and Veterans
Iraq and Vietnam: Tangled Quagmires
Moral Injury: Another Hidden Wound of War
Winnie the Pooh and War
Peace, Poetry, and the Berrigans
Peace Poetry

A recurring theme, woven into many of the sections and chapters, is the importance of the arts in bringing understanding to our wars, both to ourselves as veterans and those we try to explain our wars to. Jan and many others quoted in *Waging Peace* write poetry. I suspect that in that writing, they construct their understanding, and writing their poems brings a form of peace. I understand and deeply appreciate Jan's work in this area, and it provides my closest personal connection to much of *Waging Peace*.

As an academic, writing my dissertation, I came to understand that I learn what I think through the writing process. But sitting down and putting fingers to the keyboard was the way I organized, formalized, the information in my head. I can't call what I do in my writing "art," because it is far more utilitarian than creative, and I feel no aesthetic sense as I write.

I later used writing to reveal my Vietnam experiences to myself and others as I began to explore my post-traumatic stress and moral injury, much as Jan and other war poets have done. My story *The Little Girl at My Door*, published here in *The Veteran*, is the best example of that.

I know that in my own prose writing, from my dissertation to my later attempts to write about Vietnam, I discover what I think and feel through the writing process. I am also a nature and wildlife photographer. Along with the peace and beauty I sometimes capture, my pictures are a way to wage peace within or around my mind. *The Little Girl at My Door* is very explicitly about how I discovered that peace and beauty.

While writing this review, the ongoing efforts of the current administration to achieve political control regardless of Constitutional constraints became increasingly evident. Today brought news of another mass shooting at an American school. Minutes ago, my partner put down her newspaper, unable to consume any more of the current events. Reading *Waging Peace* will help anyone understand why I took a couple of hours away from writing today and went for a hike with my camera. An hour spent with no companion other than a Great Blue Heron; 111 photographs; not a thought of fascism or mass murder. Not escaping reality, but an hour focusing on a different aspect of it. Jan understands, and you will as well if you read his book.

The photos on this page are of a young girl I saw on our boat on the Mekong River during my 2001 visit; she reminded me of the girl I wrote about in *The Little Girl at My Door* . And a Great Blue Heron from one of my walks, which gave me a momentary respite from reality.

JACK MALLORY WAS IN VIETNAM 69-70, VVAW 70-PRESENT. 30+ YEARS OF TEACHING, 30+ YEARS OF BEING A DAD. HE STILL LOOKS UP WHEN A CHOPPER FLIES OVER.

Smart Fish Don't Bite

John Ketwig (reviewer)

Smart Fish Don't Bite
by W.D. Ehrhart
(Moonstone Press, 2025)

Bill Ehrhart is at it again, but this latest book is different. It's playful, irreverent, interesting, and fun to read. As always, Ehrhart's writing is crisp and clear, but this time he is clearly bothered by approaching 80 years old, being a cancer survivor, and being retired. A lot of Vietnam veterans will relate to those feelings! He starts the book with a Foreword, stating, "I have been increasingly able and inclined to have some fun with my writing." A few paragraphs later, he writes that he is not "inclined to worry much about how these more or less end-of-life poems will be received." He needn't worry.

There are 77 poems in this slender volume, with titles ranging from *Squirrels, Brothers, Eating Oysters in Easton, Arachnid Blues, Thirteen Ways of Looking at Presidents' Day, Thirteen Ways of Coping with Trump '24, What I Miss by Sleeping Late, Thirteen Reasons to Doubt the Existence of God, The Uselessness of Words, When I'm Gone, Hail to the Freakin' Chief*, and *If Only Dad Could See Me Now*.

I can't quote all 77, and it is damned hard to choose which lines from which poems deserve to be immortalized here. For instance:

From What It Is Worth

A team of Misfits, yes, I guess
that pretty well describes us,
thinking we could find a home,
build a world that we could live in,
one that everyone could live in
peacefully. How are we doing
so far?
Not so good? As you say, "Ah,
well,"
Cuchulain couldn't defeat the sea,
but that didn't stop him from trying.
The wilderness may well be calling
her children back; I wouldn't know
about that. I only know we've done
what we can; we can look at
ourselves
in the mirror and not be ashamed.
Maybe a little foolish for being
naïve enough to think we could
make a difference, even after
all these years of failing to register
even a blip on this lunatic world.
But I'd rather live with that
than live with knowing I did
nothing
to try to fix this mess we're all of
us in.

Or, from

Soup Can Blues

Our president says the left-wing
mob
are throwing soup cans at our cops
instead of bricks. Easier to throw,
and if you're caught, you can
always
say you're only trying to feed the
kids.
It's true that you can get a better
grip
on Campbell's Cream of Mushroom
or Progresso Italian Style Wedding
than you're going to get on a brick,
and a can's more aerodynamic, too.
But what's all this about soup?
What's the matter with baked
beans,
canned peaches, pineapple chunks,
Chef Boyardee Spaghetti O's?
Surely hungry kids'll eat that stuff.
Or even tuna fish? Those little cans'
like flat stones or silver dollars,
man,
you'd get some wicked speed with
those,
like throwing fastballs at a batter's head.
Cruising the aisles of a looted
grocery
store, the possibilities are endless:
Armour Star, Amy's Organic, Wild
Planet.
That's the trouble with our president:
he can't tell the truth to save his ass,
and still has no imagination.

And, from

God, Guns, and Ginny

Well, of course it was righteous.
Bear any burden, pay any price,
what you could do for your country.
Godless communists, after all.
You may have been only seventeen,
but you'd seen them already
in Hungary, Cuba, Berlin.
Something had to be done,
and someone would have to do it.
There is something about a
thatched-roof
hut in the middle of rice fields,
burning,
a mortally wounded woman softly
keening, child dead in her arms,
that can't be blamed on Chairman
Mao,
Castro, Lenin, or Das Kapital.
Heavy artillery flattened that
home,
Ours. Our guns did that.
Long before I reached my thirteen
months,
I discovered I had nothing to cling
to …

And, lastly, from

How Poems Are Created

A fellow poet was planning a
dinner
before my reading, and he asked
me
if I had any food restrictions.
"I'm not too keen on Brussels
sprouts
or eggplant," I replied. He said,
"Now that is a poem, my friend."
It wasn't. But it is now.

The cover of *Smart Fish Don't Bite* is a departure from Ehrhart's usual, consisting of a photo of his friend in full fly fishing regalia, waist deep in a stream, and holding a fish. The book itself is a departure, waist-deep in personal insights into a complex, passionate, and articulate guy. I don't hesitate to recommend you read it; *Smart Fish Don't Bite* is a great catch, completely enjoyable and worthwhile.

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW, and the author of …and a hard rain fell, A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam, and Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter.

Smart Fish Don't Bite

By W. D. Ehrhart

W. D. Ehrhart is a Marine Corps veteran of both the Vietnam War and Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The author of multiple books of both prose and poetry, including *Vietnam-Perkasie: a Combat Marine Memoir*, and *Thank You for Your Service: Collected Poems*, He holds a PhD from the University of Wales at Swansea, and spent several decades as a Master Teacher of English and History at the Haverford School for Boys, retiring in 2019. As the poems in this most recent collection demonstrate, he is a writer who fought in Vietnam, not a Vietnam writer.

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(ISBN: 978-1-363912-45-6) - $22.00
Moonstone Press, 110A S. 13th Street,
Philadelphia, PA 19107 - 215-735-9600
www.moonstoneartscenter.com

MOONSTONE ARTS CENTER

Joe Miller speaking on Memorial Day, May 26, 2025, Chicago.

A Veteran's Day Reminiscence

Roger Thorndike

Every Memorial Day and Veterans Day, my little brother calls me up, thanking me for my service; bless his heart, I quietly shake my head thinking, "what's he know?", whereupon I thank him for thanking me (what can I say?—except some sound-bite for the following).

I quit college in CT; California Dreamin', jumped on a bus for LA. A machinist's apprentice, it wasn't long before the Draft Board was hot on my six; "you WILL report in two weeks for your Induction." I did what I had to do to avoid conscription as a grunt to die face down in the mud for no good reason, certainly not defending my country. So, I went to the Navy (I like ships and aircraft)—"sorry, son, we're full up." Seems I wasn't alone. Next was the Air Force (I like aircraft), glad I paid attention in high school and had "hobbies", aced their tests, any job I wanted, a 462—Fighter Aircraft Weapons Systems Tech. Great tech school, learned a lot, ain't forgot. Missiles and nukes on F-101s with the 444th FIS Charleston, SC, Air Defense Command NORAD (our military actually defending America – imagine that). Then '69, minigunships in 'Nam (Spooky, Shadow, Green Hornets)—beautiful country, beautiful people, encumbered with an ugly, horrible, senseless war.

I tried not to think about what I was doing there (dominos?)—Dear Lord, forgive me. Wasn't in for rank or ribbons; just keep your head on a swivel, do your time, and get out. Every day now, I thank God I got back to the World with all my parts and most of my marbles, kissed the tarmac (no lie), and married that sweet girl who waited on pins and needles for me. No, I don't think you really need to see, smell and taste that putrid, hideous, grotesque evilness of war to know it for what it is. Still, it sure helps to cement a conviction that these foreign wars of empire are not, and never were, in the interests of America, but for the Deep Dark few livin' large off the many, triple-distilled Purest Evil tirelessly seeking to infect the Hearts of Man. USMC Major General Smedley Butler long ago spoke the unvarnished truth in his book *War is a Racket*. And whatever happened to "peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations—entangling alliances with none," Da?

Roger Thorndike is a Christian, husband, father, grandfather; rural, Southern, Patriot, pissed.

Profit-Mode Diplomacy

Allen Somerset Meece

Just out of high school in 1962, I joined the US Navy to see the world. I assumed I wouldn't have to kill anybody unless they first tried to invade the shores of North America. I believed I was joining a defense department, but I learned it is an offense department. Its job is to protect "American Interests Overseas." It enforces American Corporate Imperialism.

Corporate America resents "government FOR the people" because that phrase excludes Big Shots like themselves, who are not "people." They are money-making robots. So they ordered their Offense Department to kill innocent people in Nam for trying to install a socialist economic system to replace the old French Imperialism that they had just managed to boot out of their country at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

History has proven that the Vietnamese were right. While the French corporations were exploiting them, they couldn't even manage to feed themselves. Now they are a wealthy "most favored trading nation" of the US. They are doing fine with the new socialism. Like modern China and Russia, Vietnam is incorporating a significant portion of free enterprise into its commercial version of the social pie. They are using hybrid economic systems. We could have left Vietnam totally alone, and they, and fifty-eight thousand of us, would have come out better.

When I'm in the District of Columbia, I see the fifty-eight thousand names on the shiny grey Vietnam Wall who were comrades-in-arms who bled for a lie.

In the early sixties, the Corporate Ad-Serving Media parroted the government's initially criminally misinforming program. The fake mainstream media spread The Big Lie. They parroted fake information that said "The Viet Cong are not Freedom Fighters. They are part of the Sino-Russian Global Monopoly that wants to take your democracy, your car, and your girlfriend, probably."

After I completed Fleet Sonar School in Key West, they sent me on a warship to "Vietnam, Republic of."

The war-savvy US Government claimed there was a "military conflict" over there.

When my warship arrived in The Nam, there was wholesale slaughter already taking place. It was a sovereign nation that wanted to be left alone to fight its own civil war, just as America had had to do in its civil war in 1861.

But opportunistic Corpos had wedged themselves into the situation. They were escalating an internal conflict into an international-level blood shower with indiscriminate high-explosive cluster bombs and holocaust-producing napalm gasoline burns, terrorizing and frying both innocent families and unwilling combatants.

I was appalled to see my "respectable and honorable" government lying to everyone about its foreign invasion. I saw the country of Abraham Lincoln promulgating war on a beautiful little rice pot of a country. My common sense was confused.

The Vietnam death machine was producing happy days for Big Shot Industrial Owners. At the same time, it buried fifty-eight thousand young, unsophisticated, and well-intentioned American military personnel who were told that they were fighting for their own freedom.

That commercially lucrative war was never approved in Congress as the US Constitution requires. Instead, Congress merely gave the President a blank check to "protect freedom." What that blank check actually accomplished was to make it okay for one person, the President, to allow the US military to do whatever it wanted to do to make the Vietnamese people afraid to be Socialists.

In 1995, I was shown that my suspicion of Covert Insanity was correct when a Vietnam Warrant Officer of Intelligence, named Sedgewick Tourison, published a book titled *Project Alpha: Washington's Secret Military Operations in North Vietnam*.

Sedgewick wrote about how our "sterling" US Government concealed an "International Dirty Tricks Department" called the Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA started the Vietnam American War at the behest of its CUDs, its Corporate Unofficial Directors. The CUDs are in the employment of the Corps. Still, they do "Lobby" duty in government buildings and influence national policy, and foment wars and enable the CIA's perverse black operations with our tax money. It was that way then, and it still is now. Maybe always will be, if we're not more forceful.

Fifty-eight thousand souls behind those names on the Vietnam Wall in Washington are asking us to do them one little favor in return for their sacrifice—vote well!

Allen Meece was a sonar technician on the USS Edwards, DD-950, from 1963 to 66. He is the author of "Tin Can", a novel about destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf, available at the Amazon online bookstore.

Memories of Nam

Maurice Simon

I was a combat medic assigned to the 2/28 1st Infantry Division 68-69. I wish I had kept a journal. I was originally assigned to a Clearing Station in Dian. I was there for a few months, the first medical treatment for incoming wounded. I was good. The physicians asked me to assist. One day, I was called out of morning formation to be told I would be sent to the infantry. Everyone said this had never happened before. I was assigned to the 2/28. I was scared every day, but my fear created a great sense of survival. I spent over 6 months in combat. Body bags, great air support in almost every firefight and ambush.

I threatened to kill troops who fell asleep during an ambush. We were assigned a new lieutenant who was a fucking asshole. During a combat situation, he told our company to cross a river. I said fuck you, don't do it! The troops listened to me.

Memory. I was 20 years old. I was drafted and asked my parents about going to Canada. My dad said he would disown me. So here I am. When I look back, I realize my sense of survival made me the best soldier I could be. I slept in rice paddies and drank from bomb craters.

One memory has surfaced throughout my life. Riding a 2 1/2 ton with my platoon. The Vietnamese children were begging for rations, and I found myself alone trying to stop our troops from throwing the cans at them. As I said, I wish I had kept a journal. I've had memories and nightmares; I wanted to share this for over 50 years.

I had friends at the medical clearing stations, and I went in to get supplies not usually available to us in combat. I met a gay doctor who set me up for an interview for a psychiatric technician position at my first base camp, Dian. I exited combat and worked closely with the division's psychiatrists. Because I was a medic, I could be sent to give medication. I spent the last few months of my tour as a psych tech. Remember when I said I was sent to combat? Well, I found out the guy who sent me, the XO, who thought I was a Jew. He hated Jews. He was Black. So, as time became short, he harassed me. Oh, I also remember that during a firefight we called in support; that fucking new lieutenant again. Well, all my casualties were from friendly fire. "Friendly fire" was not used at that time. I'm not done, but exhausted.

I met a few troops who were actively anti-war. They influenced me, and my first action was making a peace sign in a cement bunker I was working on. Started to notice US-owned construction signs in small towns and Saigon. Big US oil was interested in offshore drilling. Woodstock mystified me! In January 1970, I started college and met like-minded vets involved in the VVAW. We went to DC, protested, and turned in my medals at the Pentagon.

Maurice Simon is an Army vet and longtime VVAW member living in New York.

My Daughter's Two Birthdays

Joe Miller

We are republishing this article from the Fall 2005 issue of The Veteran to celebrate the 60th birthday of my daughter Lisa. She served as The Veteran copy editor and fact checker for ten years.

While I was stationed with the Naval Security Group (NSG) at Lin Kou Air Station in Taiwan in 1963, I met and fell in love with Hui-fang. (Linda was the western name she chose when she began work at the Taiwan Defense Command's EM Club in downtown Taipei.) After nearly six months of dating, the exposure of our secret relationship (by a so-called buddy) resulted in the determination that there was a potential "security risk." We in the NSG were not allowed to develop personal relationships with individuals or families among the local population. Since I was not willing to give up this relationship, I was removed from intelligence work in early 1964 and posted to Sung Shan Airport as a courier while awaiting orders for transfer to "regular" Navy duty.

Hui-fang and I decided to proceed with the rather tedious process of obtaining permission to marry. We successfully navigated all the obstacles the Navy (and some corrupt Chinese police officers) put in our way, and we were married on June 9, 1964, by a Canadian missionary, a day and a half before I shipped out for sea duty with the USS Ticonderoga (CVA-14).

While I was at sea with the carrier group, sailing up and down the Western Pacific (WestPac) from Japan to the Philippines and off the coast of Vietnam (North and South), Hui-fang completed all the paperwork for her move to the States. By November, she was settled in with my folks near Chicago until our ship returned to San Diego from WestPac in December 1964.

The Ticonderoga was scheduled for an extended dry-dock period at Hunters Point, San Francisco, from January to July of 1965. Hui-fang and I decided that she would fly out to the West Coast so that we could spend that period living together. We got a great little flat a block and a half from Chinatown.

To this day, though Hui-fang and I split up in the 1980s, I recall the wonderful time we spent together in San Francisco. In late February 1965, we learned that she was pregnant with our first child. The doctor told us the baby would likely be born toward the end of October or early November. Our ship wasn't due to redeploy to WestPac until after that time, so I expected to be around for the birth of our first child. Hui-fang and I were ecstatic with the anticipation and excitement.

However, the growing war in Vietnam was getting in the way. Rolling Thunder began in February '65, requiring more carriers on station, but none of us in the Ticonderoga's crew expected that to change our deployment date. Then, the first official combat units landed near Da Nang in March. Soon, we were informed that the "Tico" could expect to head back toward WestPac in late September or early October. Damn! There weren't many on board who were very happy to hear this news.

The temporary household that Hui-fang and I had enjoyed for nearly six months was coming to an end. I took some leave, and in early June, we boarded a train to Chicago. We spent three days together traveling across the country, without the pressures of work or other military trappings. We even celebrated our first wedding anniversary on that train, rolling somewhere through the western plains. We had less than a month together at my folks' place, where Hui-fang would stay until my return, now scheduled for sometime in early 1966—we hoped.

On the afternoon of my flight from O'Hare back to San Diego (where the ship was now waiting), Hui-fang came along in my dad's car. When we arrived at the airport parking lot and I pulled my sea bag from the trunk, she started to cry. Deep sobs mixed with anguished cries that I should not leave. She would not leave the car to accompany me to the departure gate. I choked back my own tears and swallowed the anger that I felt at being pulled from her. By this time, we had been married for just over a year and had spent about six months together. She was pregnant, and I was heading off to WestPac again. I would not be back until well after the birth of our first child. However, we all know the military's response to this kind of situation. "If the government had wanted you to have a wife and family, they would have issued you one."

Joe, Hui-fang and Lisa (at one year), late 1966.

By late October, following the Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) in and around the Hawaiian Islands, the "Tico" again arrived off the coast of Vietnam, first to the "Dixie" station in the south. We then steamed toward "Yankee" station in the north sometime in November, in the so-called hazardous duty (combat) zone. This provided everyone with a small bonus and free mail privileges. It also meant that communications were primarily directed toward flight operations and the carrier's general operational needs. In fact, I recently realized that we were probably "on line," that is, on station, during the major battle in the Ia Drang Valley. Though we were further north, I expect that our aircraft may have been even busier as a result. And here I was awaiting some word about the birth of our first child, in the midst of nearly nonstop war activity, when no war had been declared. I had no way of knowing what was going on back home.

Finally, on November 19, 1965, a delayed telegram (dated November 12) from my dad was handed to me. The printed words shouted to me: I was now the father of a healthy and beautiful baby girl, Lisa Ellen Hui-mei Miller. Baby and mother were doing just fine. Lisa and I would not meet until February 1966, when she was three months old.

That is why I always feel my daughter has two birthdays, because she was born to the world one full week before she was "born" to me. On November 12 and 19, I will again say to my daughter, "Happy Birthday, Lisa!" Both times!

Joe Miller is a board member of VVAW.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editors,

The review of my poetry book, *When Eagles Vie with Valkyries*, did not include the publisher's name. The problem is it's from a small press that doesn't sell on Amazon, thus if anyone is interested in buying a copy, they won't be able to find it.

When Eagles Vie with Valkyries was published by Main Street Rag Publishing Company and can be ordered through their bookstore: *www.mainstreetragbookstore.com*

The book was nominated by the publisher for the National Book Award (2024), but it did not win.

Thank you for publishing the review.

All best,
Paul Hellweg

Letter to the Editor

I have been a member of VVAW since 1971. I joined right after I returned from Vietnam, and I was still on active duty, stationed at the Pentagon, three floors below ground. I lived in Arlington, VA, and would take the bus home to Lancaster, PA on weekends. There were a lot of anti-war protests in those days, and as a result, there was a lot of tear gas in the air at the bus stop. I ended up going to the Quartermaster at the Pentagon and got a gas mask that I would pack in my overnight bag. The bus driver would not let me on the bus unless I took the mask off.

I was taking part in the Dewey Canyon protest at the mall when the cops came with a bullhorn and announced that we had to disperse in five minutes or be forcibly removed and arrested. I was part of the Pennsylvania contingent, and we voted, I believe, 212 to 0, to stay. Five minutes later, it was the cops who dispersed, much to our disappointment. The cops were wise to leave. They knew we were not going anywhere.

Peace.

—Tom Charles, VVAW member since 1971 and Veterans For Peace member since 2005.

Land of Smiles

JOHN KETWIG (REVIEWER)

Land of Smiles
by A.A. Maytree
(iUniverse, Inc., 2008)

I left Vietnam in September 1968, with 15 months remaining on my enlistment. Instead of returning home to "the World", I transferred to nearby Thailand, where I completed my military obligation, avoided any possibility that I might be assigned to stand on the Pentagon steps and hold a bayoneted rifle against the anti-war protestors, and attempted to get my head straight enough that I could dare to walk down the street in my hometown. It was a hell of a year, and to this day, I have wonderful memories of Thailand and the Thai people. I wrote about my year in Thailand in my memoir, ... *and a hard rain fell*.

A few months ago, someone told me about a book called *Land of Smiles*, about an American Peace Corps volunteer who spent three years in Thailand, arriving in 1969. I had to read it! I found *Land of Smiles* listed on Amazon and received it a few days later. From the first, I was attracted by the title. I found the Thai people to be the happiest society I've ever known. Even the poorest peasants are quick to smile and laugh, and they were especially welcoming to newcomers. I noted that the Thais live their religion with far more attention and allegiance than any segment of the American population save Catholic priests and nuns. *Land of Smiles* describes Thailand perfectly.

Author Maytree was a college graduate and a divinity student at a Catholic seminary in 1968, when he became skeptical of the church and uncertain about his faith in God. He resigned and was immediately ordered to report for a draft physical. He was walking and breathing, and rated 1-A. Unwilling to be drafted and sent to Vietnam, he volunteered for the Peace Corps. He was accepted, trained, and in May of 1969, he arrived in Thailand. He would spend two years in the Peace Corps. If he quit in mid-stream, or failed to make it through the two years, he would be immediately re-classified 1-A and eligible for the draft.

Maytree's first assignment was to teach English as a second language at a private school, where he was assigned to oversee a class of "problem" boys. A few weeks later, he was reassigned to a less disruptive class, and he began a freelance writing career with the *Bangkok World*. President Nixon announced the draft system would be dismantled and replaced by an all-volunteer military. The author could have left the Peace Corps and returned home, but he opted to stay in Bangkok for a while.

While I admit that *Land of Smiles* touched many of my personal nerve endings and nostalgic memories, this was not a particularly informative or enjoyable book. The author and his story both bounce around a lot. He accomplished his goal of avoiding being drafted and traveled frequently, visiting some of Thailand's most exotic locations. Still, his story seems random and disorganized, without any clear theme or plot to involve the reader. He tosses in a lot of Thai words and phrases, most of which I was able to decode using my old Thai-English dictionary. In a few cases, his pronunciation suggestions and translation to English varied significantly from my memory and my dictionary, but that wasn't surprising. I was stationed in Korat, or Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand's second-largest city, located about 60 miles northeast of Bangkok. Whenever we went to Bangkok, we were told our pronunciations made us sound "like farmers." Mister Maytree learned his Thai in Bangkok, and it was a significantly different dialect from what we heard in Korat.

I was mildly uncomfortable reading *Land of Smiles* until I was about two-thirds of the way through the book. Chapter 46 begins with the author receiving a surprising phone call from a man named Cornell Hawekridge. Regular readers of *The Veteran* will recall that I wrote an obituary article for my friend Cornelius Hawkridge a couple of years ago. I had become familiar with Hawkridge through a book a friend had allowed me to borrow. The American title was *The Greedy War,* and it was also published in England under the title *A Very Personal War*, which included photographs. He was raised in Hungary, where his father was a police colonel hunting down former Nazi criminals. When the Russians took over Hungary after World War II, Hawkridge joined the resistance and was captured and sentenced to life mining coal in one of Stalin's gulags. One morning, seven years later, he was freed; he never knew why. He intended to rejoin the resistance, but when he saw Soviet tanks rumbling into Budapest, he left Hungary and eventually made his way to the United States, where he became a citizen. He became involved in security work, first in the Dominican Republic, and then in Vietnam.

Working as a civilian consultant to a US foundation running a refugee camp in Qui Nhon, Hawkridge soon discovered that Vietnamese officials were stealing 90 percent of all the goods being shipped into Vietnam, and selling them in the black market marketplaces, especially in the port city of Qui Nhon. He immediately reported this outrageous behavior and found that the officials were well aware of it and totally reluctant to take any action. The black market was selling over $10 million in stolen American goods a month, anything from clothes and boots to rifles, ammunition, food rations, and vehicles. When Hawkridge asked to purchase a tank, he was told there weren't any in stock at that moment, but would he consider an APC, or armored personnel carrier, a smaller track-driven vehicle? He transferred to another American company, a trucking firm hauling Army equipment and supplies around the Saigon area. Again, he saw huge quantities of M-16s, ammunition, building supplies, and items intended for the PX system were loaded onto trucks at the port facilities and driven directly to the black market. By agreement with the Vietnamese government, Americans were not allowed to unload goods from planes and ships arriving in Vietnam, or to drive delivery trucks. Of course, many of the drivers and their employers were Viet Cong. Losses were running $100 million a year! Hawkridge, whose anti-communist sympathies were well known, tried to report these thefts to his superiors, the US military, and Congress. He became a marked man.

In May of 1968, Hawkridge was invited to testify before a US Senate subcommittee, but before he could do so, he was run off the road in Washington state. His new wife was killed, and he was hospitalized with serious injuries. He did testify before the subcommittee, but was severely limited in the topics he was allowed to discuss. *Life* magazine did an article about him, but the article was downsized when Ted Kennedy drove a Buick off a bridge in Chappaquiddick, Massachusetts, killing a young female companion who was not his wife.

Having seen a similar theft ring operating among the higher-ranking officers and non-coms of our battalion in Korat, I immediately sought to buy a copy of *The Greedy War*, and, in those days before the Internet, several used book stores told me that it was a "suppressed" book, targeted by the government to prevent the American people from learning about the corruption in Vietnam. I had no idea our government did that! Eventually, I was able to find and purchase a copy. Convinced that Cornelius Hawkridge was an actual hero of the war in Vietnam, I set out on a quest to meet the man and shake his hand. I was surprised to find he had a close-knit circle of friends protecting him. After more than seven years of searching, I was finally able to talk with Hawkridge by phone. He was living a hermit's existence on a remote farm, but after we talked several times, he invited my wife and me to visit. For about the next thirty years, we talked by phone about once a week and became very dear friends. We returned to his home on many occasions.

Cornelius Hawkridge was a man the word "curmudgeon" was invented to describe. He was strictly old-school and rigidly formal. He never smoked or drank alcohol, and he would never use profanity. Author Maytree calls him Cornell Hawekridge and has him cursing like a sailor! I was shocked. Maytree's description of Hawkridge's background agreed with what I knew, but the quotations Maytree describes are completely out of character with the man I knew. To the day he died, Hawkridge believed the KGB was searching for him and intending to eliminate him.

Is *Land of Smiles* a worthwhile book? Yes, it offers a realistic overview of the roles Thailand and the Thai people played in the Vietnam War, but the author's treatment of Conelius Hawkridge is twisted and disrespectful. This isn't a book you are apt to find at a bookstore or in a library, but anything's possible. I believe A.A. Maytree was in Thailand during the Vietnam War years, but monsoon rain must have blurred his notes. He has done a serious disservice to a genuine American hero.

JOHN KETWIG IS A LIFETIME MEMBER OF VVAW, AND THE AUTHOR OF ...AND A HARD RAIN FELL, A G.I.'S TRUE STORY OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM, AND VIETNAM RECONSIDERED: THE WAR, THE TIMES, AND WHY THEY MATTER.

What American Youth Need To Know

Once I realized I was the enemy in Viet Nam,
I emotionally defected to the other side.

That is where I found freedom for the

first time.

I carry that sense of reality deep inside of

me every time I think of the Vietnamese who

desperately fought against the brutal U.S. Military.

Their knowledge of suffering and sacrifice is

far beyond any American who was in Viet Nam.

The Vietnamese fought for the lives of every

member of their family and village.

American soldiers absolutely did not.
So, who really knows the truth of the
American War in Viet Nam?

—Mike Hastie
Medic Viet Nam
I was born in America, but my heart is Vietnamese.

The Kit Carson Scout

Richard Fleming

He was one of us, and yet he wasn't. He was no more than a kid…but so were we. I never knew his real name. We simply called him "Kit."

In 1968, First Force Recon was based a few miles outside of Da Nang. Our teams were running combat patrols and clandestine operations all along the Laotian border.

I was on guard duty one afternoon when a shiny red motorcycle roared down our road and skidded to a stop in front of my post. A skinny Vietnamese kid wearing a new set of camouflaged utilities stepped off the bike and handed me his paperwork. At first, I thought that he was an RVN soldier, but his orders stated that he would be joining our company as a "Kit Carson Scout."

This was a new Marine Corps program that offered money and other perks to Viet Cong and NVA soldiers willing to defect to the American side and fight against their former comrades. They were named after the famous frontiersman Kit Carson. The South Vietnamese called them "Hồi Chánh", a term loosely translated as "members who have returned to the righteous side." I can only imagine what their former comrades called them.

In 1967, General Westmoreland decreed that all infantry units in Vietnam use Kit Carson Scouts in some capacity. Indigenous scouts have long been utilized in warfare. If an army can persuade someone who knows the terrain, language, and customs of the land to collaborate with them, the results can be decisive. Westmorland's program certainly made good copy for our in-country rag, *The Stars and Stripes*. Despite the bribery money, however, there were few takers. The casualty rate of Kit Carson Scouts was extremely high, and most communist soldiers apparently preferred to remain true to their cause.

Kit was assigned to our third platoon as their "point man", the most dangerous position on the team. The point man would be the first to walk into an ambush or trigger a booby trap. After he had gone out on a few missions, I asked my buddy in the 3rd platoon about how Kit had handled himself in the bush.

"He did OK…" he answered grudgingly, "but how can we trust a traitor? He might lead us into an ambush!" The Marine next to him shook his head and added: "I kept one eye out for Charlie and the other on him."

I couldn't imagine Kit intentionally leading his team into an ambush. He would have been the first to die, either shot by the enemy or by the Marines he was leading. If captured by the NVA and they found he was a deserter, he would have been executed on the spot. What a position to be in!

I was thankful that Kit had not been assigned to my team. I didn't see how he could help us. Unlike many infantry units in Vietnam, we had limited contact with the local population. We didn't need anyone able to speak Vietnamese. If we captured a prisoner, they were quickly extracted and interrogated in the rear. Our missions were run so far out in the mountains that any knowledge Kit might have had of local terrain would have been useless. We had our maps and always knew where we were. There were also more troubling issues. In Force Recon, we were trained to work together as a unit. Bringing in someone who had not gone through our training, whose loyalty was suspect, and whose English was limited didn't seem like a good idea to me—but of course, no one asked me for my opinion.

Unlike the rest of us, Kit was able to leave the compound whenever he wished, and this also created some tension among the other men. Kit Carson Scouts were given the nominal rank of staff sergeant and were exempt from formations, PT, and work parties. Kit would arrive on his motorbike the night before a mission and join his team when they went out the following day. He spent the rest of his time at the Vietnamese village a few miles down the road from our compound. The other men couldn't help but resent these privileges.

I had always been interested in languages and offered to pay Kit a few bucks if he would teach me some Vietnamese. He agreed but asked in return that I teach him English. We met every week or so for a few hours, and

he seemed to enjoy being with me. I can't say that we ever became friends, but I was probably the closest person to a friend that he had in the company.

I never asked Kit about whether he had been an NVA soldier or a member of the Viet Cong, but after we had gotten to know each other better, I did ask him why he had decided to switch sides. I was expecting him to say something like he believed in democracy or hated communism, but he answered simply:

"I think Americans win."

That certainly sounded like a reasonable answer. In 1968, America had over half a million men in the country, and we were inflicting enormous casualties on the enemy. At the time, it certainly did seem like we were winning the war. From what he said, Kit had calculated his odds of survival and decided that he stood a better chance with the Americans—but then he added:

"And I wanted a motorcycle."

Now the truth came out! That second answer explained everything. Of course, he wanted a motorcycle, a shiny red one with plenty of chrome. He probably immediately took the money the Marine Corps gave him for deserting and went out to buy himself the fanciest Yamaha he could find.

At his age, few young men have a brain in their heads—I know I certainly didn't. Their thoughts are driven by hormones and other forces completely beyond their control. Kit had no idea what he was getting into—he just wanted his motorcycle.

Perhaps in time, Kit could have earned the trust of the other men, but after only a few months, he was transferred to a Grunt unit, and I lost track of him. The men in the 3d platoon had never really accepted him as a member of their team and weren't sad to see him go, but I was. I felt sorry for him, and I missed our language lessons.

Perhaps America could have done more to mitigate the war's atrocities, but our leaders preferred to put the whole dreary business of Vietnam behind them. This pattern continued decades later when Afghanistan fell, and the people who supported the US were left to the mercy of the Taliban. If America continues abandoning those who assisted us in the past, it is unlikely that we will find anyone willing to support us in the future.

War brutalizes everyone, the victors and the vanquished. It brings to the surface our worst tendencies. Perhaps that is why we seem to relish it so much. War throws aside civilization's rules and legitimizes actions that are reviled in normal life. The desire to inflict pain and the thirst for revenge seem to be ingrained in our very nature. We seem to be unwilling to show mercy even to those whom we have thoroughly conquered. It is always the victor who decides who is the hero and who the collaborator.

If I were able to speak to Kit today and ask him again about his decision to join the Americans, he would probably answer. "I chose the wrong side."

Richard Fleming served as a recon scout with 1st Force Recon Co. from 1968-1969. He wrote about his experiences in "Chasing Charlie - A Force Recon Marine in Vietnam."

Squirrels and the War

Like the squirrels on the farm,
Most animals don't know about war.
All I knew was I had to do what my country said I had to do.
We had country school and rural free delivery.
We sang "my country 'tiz of thee, sweet land of liberty."
It was the honorable thing to do.
But I was scared to leave the farm
Where I thought I'd live forever with the squirrels.

Knowing nothing about a strange place called Viet Nam
On the other side of the world by China --
You could dig a hole to get there.

Encouraged by my father who went in World War II,
Not to hide behind the plow, he said.
I had no college ahead, no job, no conscience, either.
Mother cried but had no voice.
The TV said I'd get a gun and be in the jungle
Looking for little people to shoot,
Or be killed by somebody called "Gook".
Likely his convictions stronger than mine –
In our wallets they'd find pictures of girl-friends
we'd left behind.

More cowardly than smartly I didn't take the Army draft,
That took the farm kids one by one in 1966.
"Back in two years" the Army said.
It was four years in the Air Force – and a better chance
of staying alive.
Passed my physical and got my first airplane ride to Texas
For basic training, kind of like the Army that way -- Army-light.
And saw my first cockroaches under the mop in the mess hall
As big as rats – a whole new world.

Then Southeast Asia bound to a base on the Mekong River
Called Nakhon Phanom where I ran up and down the flight-line
In a little pickup truck, with clearance from the tower
Keeping the runway lit so single prop planes
With bombs tucked under their wings like babies
Could take off at night.
We watched explosions flashing on the other side of the river
In the green jungle mountains.

For a year it got rainy, hot and the mud was red and sticky.
Bob Hope and Neal Armstrong came to the base
For a Christmas Show – how lucky was that?
Then back to the states with a medal for Viet Nam service
But never carried a gun and never was in Viet Nam,
Never wanted to be a fraud either.
College students got shot in Ohio that year protesting the war.

Just a kid, turned 21 in the war –
It must have been the right thing,
To help kill those people – I suppose some were farm kids, too.
I wondered, did they have squirrels in Laos

—Dan L. Richter

Where We Came From, Who We Are, Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States, including active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW also took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we began the first rap groups to deal with traumatic aftereffects of war, setting the example for readjustment counseling at vet centers today. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange victims.

Today our government still finances and arms undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world in the name of "democracy." American troops have again been sent into open battle in the Middle East and covert actions in Latin America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans from all eras are still denied justice—facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent future generations from being put through a similar tragedy, and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. Anyone who supports this overall effort, whether Vietnam veteran or not, veteran or not, may join us in this long-term struggle. JOIN US!

created by Robert Spicher

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. The original MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting (the sword) the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China (the China Gates), but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is over 55 years old. The insignia, VVAW® and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.® are registered trademarks belonging to VVAW and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without written permission from the VVAW Board of Directors.

Beware of VVAW-AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist" (VVAW-AI). VVAW-AI is actually the creation of an obscure ultraleft sect, designed to confuse people in order to associate themselves with VVAW's many years of activism and struggle. They are not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. and are not affiliated with us in any way. We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit.

SUPPORT VVAW!
DONATE OR JOIN TODAY!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
VVAW Membership
P.O. Box 355
Champaign, IL 61824-0355

Membership Application

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email address _____
Branch _____
Dates of Service (if applicable) _____
Unit _____
Military Occupation _____
Rank _____
Overseas Duty _____
Dates _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW email list.
☐ I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW.
☐ Sign me up for a lifetime membership in VVAW. $250 is enclosed.

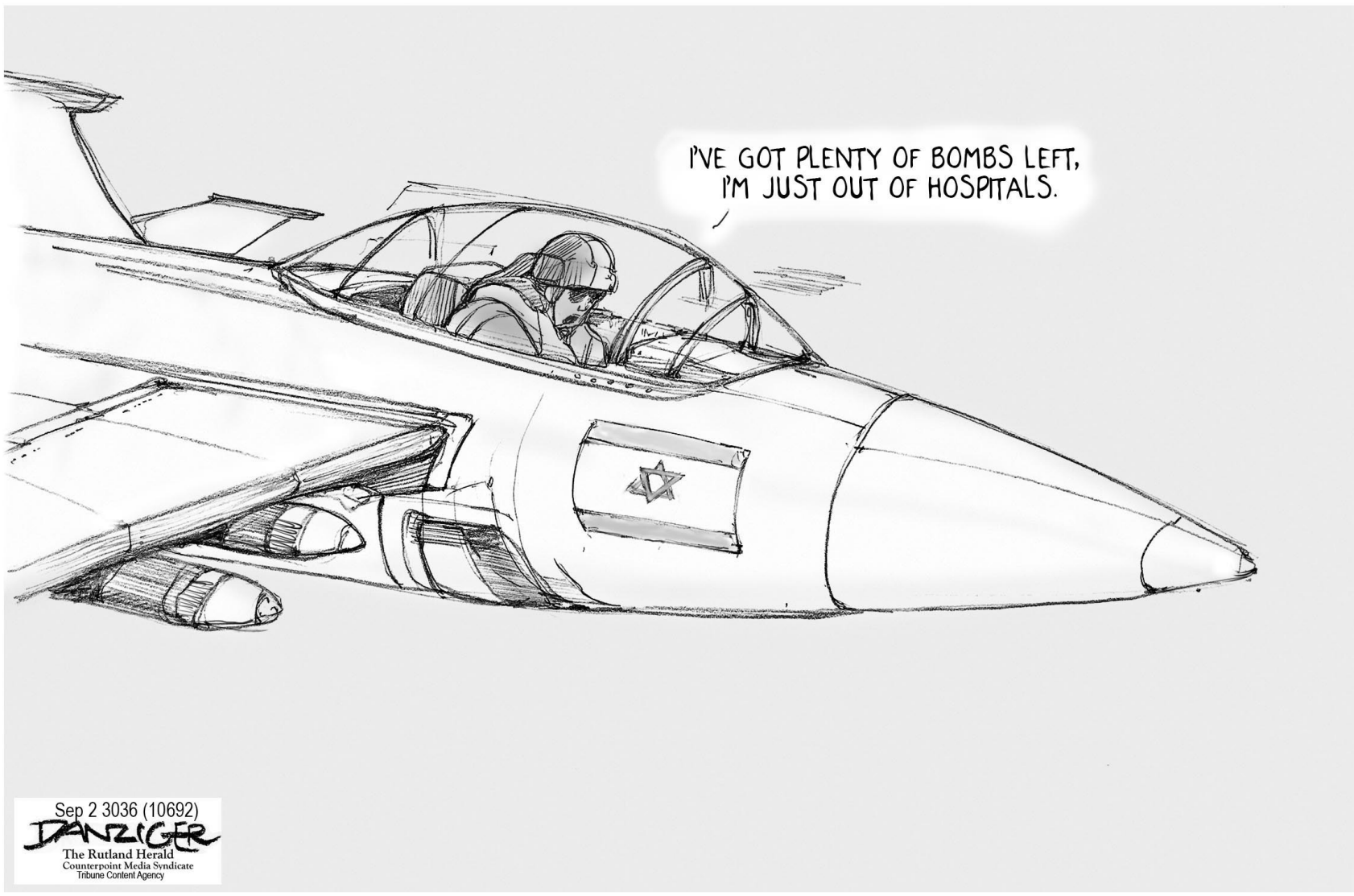
Membership in VVAW is open to ALL people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice and support the work of VVAW and its historic legacy. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is $25.00 (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

Signature _____

Date _____

Total Amount Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.



RECOLLECTIONS

VVAW Memories

Mike Woloshin

Mike Woloshin at Chicago Veterans Day event, November 11, 2001.

As I consider the brothers and sisters of VVAW as family, I mourn the passing of Joan Davis and Mitch Kuhn, whom I first met over 45 years ago. I first met Joan and her husband Bill in 1980 on Memorial Day at the "Bathtub (Chicago Mayor Jane Byrne's Vietnam Veterans Memorial)," when Bill invited me to a barbecue at his place. Bill made the mistake of grilling stewing chickens (tough as GI issue boots) for which I razzed him for years. But, Bill also had a sense of humor; when a guy Bill's size later claimed to have been a "tunnel rat," Bill retorted: "which tunnel, the Holland, or the Lincoln!" Bill invited me to join him for my first Milwaukee Chapter Campout, which was precisely 10 years after I returned to the world. Joan drove Bill's pickup. Becky was in her child seat in front, while Bill and I rode in the back of his truck.

The Campouts had their cast of characters, with John Lindquist working the grill, Annie Bailey eating the pig's eyes at the pig roast to gross out the kids, Mitch Kuhn selling buttons, frequent beer runs, the "Winnebago Wars," nightly blues concerts by "Leroy Airmaster," and Barry Romo leading political discussions. Chris Molloy and Lee Channing were also frequent participants. Lee characterized my tent as evil-looking and called it the "Darth Vader Special."

Between Campouts, the Chicago Chapter held "Standdowns" at the Humboldt Park National Guard Armory, providing meals for homeless vets, where I usually worked in the scullery with Bill Branson, Bill Davis, Barry Romo, and others scrubbing out pots and cooking utensils. We also held Memorial Day and Veterans' Day Ceremonies at "the bathtub" in downtown Chicago.

In mid-May 1982, we held "Dewey Canyon IV," sleeping on the Mall in DC for three nights and in a church on 14th St for the fourth. I still remember standing fire watch in that church, then going down to the basement to light fires under the kettles of eggs to be boiled and served for breakfast. That basement smelled, as some Maoists would put it, like "pre-revolutionary China," and the cockroaches marched across the floor in battalion strength. We rode around DC in the back of a "deuce and a half" and often yelled out "lock and load and face the rear." We were denied access to Arlington Cemetery and left out orange colored wreaths at the entrance. It was only years later that the VA acknowledged that "Agent Orange" was a real threat to veterans' health and lives. On Veterans' Day weekend 1982, we returned for the dedication of "the wall," a memorial for the 58,281 KIA and MIA Despite the provision of security at the site where we were to have an exhibit, thousands of copies of our newspaper, *The Veteran*, were stolen.

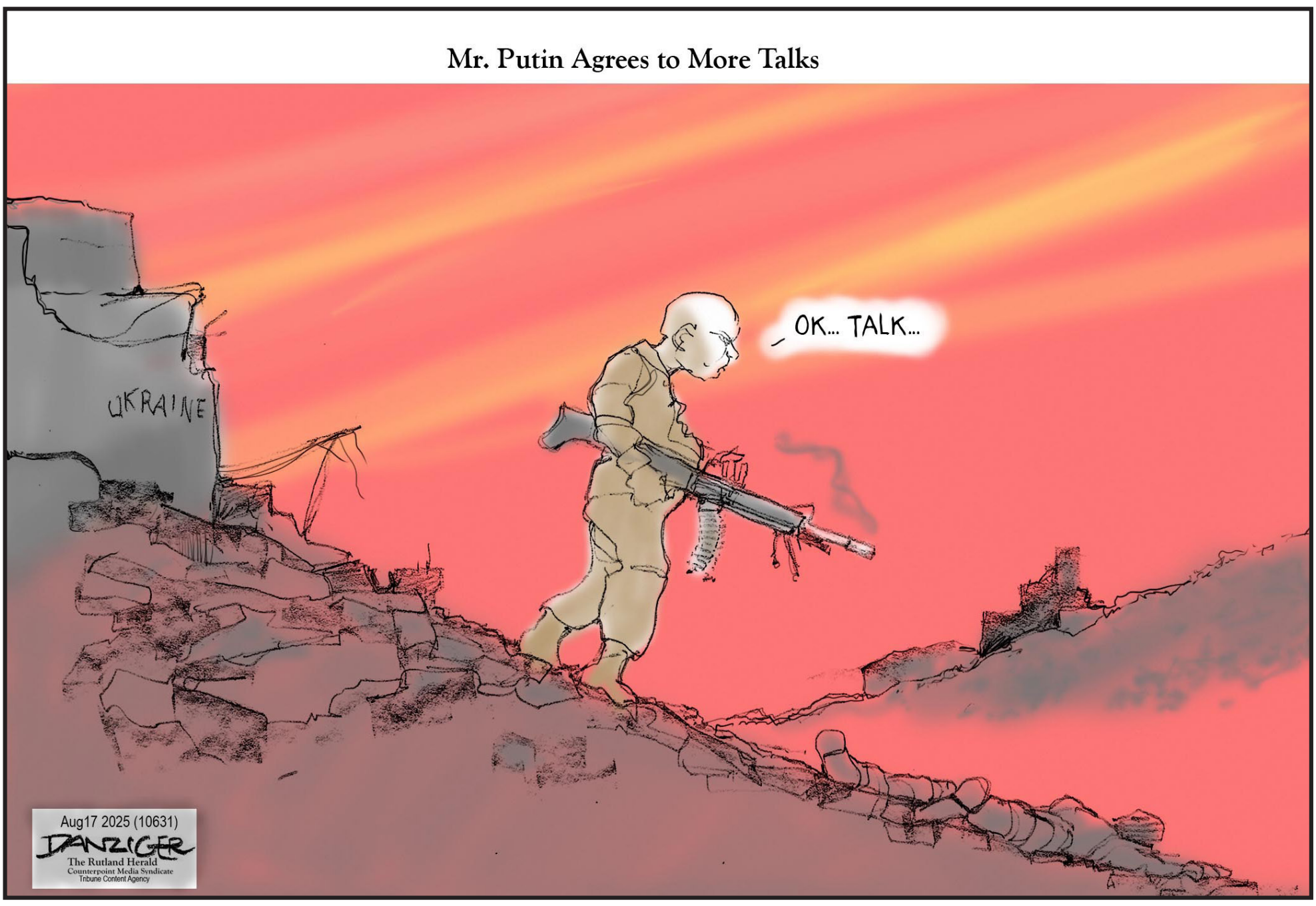
On Memorial Day 1992, VVAW celebrated our 25th Anniversary in New York City, staying at the Vista Hotel, meeting H. Bruce Franklin, author of *Myth-Making in America*, which exposed the abuse of the POW-MIA issue to block recognition and reconciliation with Vietnam, met Vietnamese combatants, and connected with our brothers and sisters from around the US.

That was the largest turnout of VVAW members from around the country.

Our 35th Anniversary was held in Milwaukee, with authors and members from the Midwest. The VVAW 30th Anniversary was held in Chicago, while the 40th, which drew a large turnout, was held at Roosevelt University in downtown Chicago in 2007. It was the last for Bill Davis and Dave Cline, both of whom passed on shortly after. I recall writing about the loss of leadership in the organization.

We wonder what our legacy will be in the years to come. The last veteran of "the war to end all wars (World War I) died in 2011; the "Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, "many of whom later served in World War II, are all gone. VA statistics: of the 16.4 million who served in World War II, including my late father (Combat Engineers, European Theater), only 66,000 remain. Of the 2.7 million of us who served "in country," or in the coastal waters of Vietnam, only about 850,000 remain. Our primary health problems remain linked to Agent Orange, PTSD, and hearing loss.

Two years ago, I lost my wife of 28 years, Leslee, to cancer and hypertension; I don't know how much time I have left, but what I have so far is due to my quitting drinking and smoking.

I dedicate this RECOLLECTION to those I know well and are now gone: Barry Romo, Dave Cline, Bill Davis, Joan Davis, Mitch Kuhn, Lee Channing, Chris Molloy, Mike Sutton, Mike Gold, and to the many others whose names I've forgotten.

Mike Woloshin, AMH-2, USN, ATKRON 86, onbd USS Coral Sea (CVA-43), Vietnam (Yankee Station) 1969-1970. Mike is the grandson of Ukrainian immigrants, a retired Assistant Cook County Public Defender, and active in VVAW since joining in 1971.